CAN I BE A CHRISTIAN

JAMES O. HANNAY

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CAN I BE A CHRISTIAN

NOVELS BY GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM
(JAMES O. HANNAY)

The Great Grandmother

Found Money

CAN I BE A CHRISTIAN

By
JAMES O. HANNAY
Author of
The Spirit and Origin of Christian Monasticism
The Wisdom of the Desert, Etc.

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INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN EDITION

THESE letters were written to an Englishman, and published, in the first instance, for English readers. Some explanation—I will not say apology—is due to American readers. They will find what I have written about the English Church strange to them. They must remember that in England the national church occupies a position which no church fills in America. It is an integral part of the national life, and the religious consciousness of the people is bound up with that church.

First of all, it is the church of great national events. By its prelates kings are crowned. Its shrines are the scenes of great acts of national thanksgiving. It voices the nation's appeals to the

Almighty in times of need and trouble. Its bishops legislate in the national assembly. Its clergy are the ministers of public bodies like Parliament. They preach assize sermons before judges. They hold, in virtue of their office as priests of the Church of England, a place in the state which no other clergy hold there and none can hold in America.

So much is the result of state establishment. But even if that were done away the Church of England would still hold a unique position in English life. The words of her Prayer Book have soaked into our literature. They have colored our common speech. What is true of the Authorized Version of Holy Scripture in all English-speaking nations is true in England of the Prayer Book also. A man may refuse membership of that church, preferring some other; or he may decline to call

himself a Christian at all and to belong to any church. He will not thereby escape from the atmosphere of the church. In England he can not avoid that.

To certain Englishmen — a very large number—the Church of England is still more. It was the church of their baptism. It is, almost always, the church of their school; and to an Englishman his school holds the place in his heart which an American gives to his university. Much of the church's teaching may be forgotten, ignored or rejected in later life, but the memory of services in the school chapel lingers, a fragrant and beloved thing. The emotions of the day of confirmation may have passed quite away, but some memory of the day survives, a recollection, dim perhaps, but there. The Church of England is for most Englishmen, for almost all educated

Englishmen, the church of certain great events in life, weddings, their own perhaps or their friends', and funerals. The joys and sorrows of such times have been voiced for them by the church's words. Quite possibly they may seldom or never enter the church except on such occasions, and it may be only then that organized religion actually touches their lives, but it is the Church of England which touches them then, it and not any other.

Not even now have we fully described the position of the national Church in England. The English landscape, the very aspect of the country, has been affected by the Church. In cities and great towns there are buildings often fine and impressive, which are devoted to the use of men of other creeds. In the villages and all over the countryside the shrine of the Church of England stands alone, or almost alone,

the one visible, ever present House of God. In entering an English village you do not ask, because you see for yourself, which is the English church. You do not ask, because you know, to whom the gray-walled building in the midst of God's Acre belongs. Boys and girls grow up under the shadow of its tower. Men and women die with the sound of its bells in their ears. They may be Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, in the familiar language of the English countryside, "chapel folk;" but in a very real sense the church is their church because it is the Church of England and they are English people.

All this is difficult for any one, not English, to understand; but once it is understood it gives the explanation of the way I have written about the Church of England. By those who understand I shall not be accused of that

unreality of which I have myself so often complained, or of a worse thing still, an insidious form of sectarian propaganda.

Yet I should not publish these letters in America at all if I did not think that there is something more important in them than what I have written about the Church of England. That is a matter for Englishmen, perhaps only for a certain class of Englishmen. The essential problems with which I have tried to deal are American as much as English, quite as much American as English.

Why is it that men of good will, sincere admirers of the Gospel teaching, earnest in their endeavor to establish righteousness, pity and love in the world, have ceased to believe in Jesus Christ as God, Savior, Divine Captain? That is the question which we want to answer. It is not for one side of the

Atlantic only, or for the other only, for men of one nation and not of another. No doubt it is for all nations. But I have little doubt that it presses upon us, of the English-speaking nations, more than it does on others.

It is true, I think, that Englishmen and Americans are more eager and earnest than other people in good works, in their altruism, in their purpose of working for others and not only for themselves. More than other peoples they are trying to do the will of God in the world and to put into practise the precepts of the Gospel. Does this sound like foolish boasting? If so, I offer St. Paul's apology: "I must needs glory, though it be not expedient." I must boast because I have seen, as all men with eyes must see, the endeavors of self-sacrificing men and women to succor the needy, to heal the sick, to raise the fallen, to better the

evil that is in the world. I have seen that it is the English and American peoples who are chiefly stirred by this divine benevolence. They have endeavored, as no one else has, to put into actual practise the extremest and apparently the most visionary of the Gospel precepts. Scarcely had the Armistice been signed when Englishmen and Americans were abroad among their conquered foes with food and succor. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink." Quite literally our peoples have done this. Did men ever do it before on such a scale? Are any other peoples doing it to-day? It is easy to mock at the methods, to point out mistakes, to discern the spirit of self-seeking and self-advertisement here and there, but the broad fact remains that these are the things our peoples have done and that these things are entirely in ac-

cordance with the mind and teachings of Jesus Christ.

How strange it seems then that those peoples who have accepted the Gospel precepts as the guide of life, should refuse to recognize the claims of Him who gave the law and showed the way. Yet this is what we see again and again. The very men and women who are foremost in doing the things which Jesus Christ taught us we ought to do have turned away from Him. His will is a burning reality, a compelling force which shapes their lives and drives them on. He Himself is no more to them than a shadow figure, dim as the hero of some old romance.

In the centuries which we call "The age of faith" men slew, burned, oppressed, lusted, and were for the most part indifferent to human suffering. But they believed and adored. Now, the best of our generation are giving

themselves gladly to the task of redressing wrongs and relieving distress, but they will not—can not—at all events they do not believe.

This is the real matter of these letters. They are an endeavor, very feeble I am sure, perhaps quite mistaken, to discover what is wrong with the presentation of the faith of the Gospel, since men of good will no longer accept it, and to find out what is the matter with these same men of good will in that they have failed to accept the offered companionship of Him who ought to be, who, as I believe, wants to be their friend.

This also I believe. Doing good is splendid and brings its reward to those who persevere. Self-sacrifice is glorious and they who practise it win the precious approval of their own conscience. But better than the sure reward of well doing and better than the

calm approval of our own souls is the friendship of Jesus Christ, that dear companionship, that sweet inward power and consolation. They miss that who turn away from Him. And why should they miss it when it is plain that all they do is not for others only but for Him, and that He smiles with approval on them?

JAMES O. HANNAY.

BUDAPEST,
June, 1923

PREFACE

It will be obvious at once to any one who reads them that these letters are not addressed to theologians, or even to theological students. To them some of what I have written will seem commonplace. The rest will probably strike them as unsound and therefore irritating.

Nor have I written for those who retain the simple and untroubled faith of their childhood. Happy and blessed are they. I sincerely hope that they will not read these letters. They might find in them things which would pain and perhaps disturb them; though I trust that, even so, they would discern that I too love the Master whom they love, whom they serve, doubtless much more faithfully than I do.

I have written—as should be clear from the letters themselves—for men and women who find themselves in sympathy with the Christian ideal of life, who regard the Lord Jesus with reverence and affection, who cherish tender memories of the religion of their childhood, who nevertheless are out of touch with the Church; who, because they find no place in any Christian organization, have come to think that there is no place for them and that they can not consider themselves Christians at all. They count themselves strangers, no longer citizens of the City of God, partly because they do not, and, as they think, can not believe many things commonly believed by Christian people; but chiefly because they do not recognize as divine the sort of life which the Church, any church, has produced and fostered. These, to whom I have written, cherish the

desire to be Christians. They do not want to be churchmen. Christ attracts them still. The Church—its creeds, its ways, its spirit—repels.

Perhaps—probably—what I have written is of little worth to them or to any one. I make no claim for it except that it is written honestly and out of a good heart. I have practised no economy, nor tried to daub tottering walls with untempered mortar. I have hoped to help men whom I love to see that in Jesus Christ they may find One wholly responsive to all that is best in them, a Master whom they need not fear to follow, a Captain of Salvation for their souls.

J. O. H.

Can I Be a Christian

I

ONE Sunday morning last summer, my dear S, you bicycled three miles to attend an early service in a little church in which I ministered at that time. You probably remember the morning. You rode fast, not for pleasure but because you were afraid of being late. In order to be there at all you had to get out of bed long before your accustomed hour. Such exertion will keep that morning fresh in your memory. When you reached the church you found yourself one of a congregation of about twenty people and with them you received at my hands what the Prayer Book calls, "The most comfortable sacrament of the body and the Blood of Christ."

Afterward, later that same day, we were smoking together. From the terrace where our chairs were set we were watching the waves break on rocky islands outside and boats with white sails go by. There you spoke to me, suddenly and without any questioning or prompting on my part.

"I am afraid," you said, "that I very seldom go to church. When I do it is chiefly for the sake of old associations and the memories that are awakened by the words I hear."

I made no answer, and after a while you spoke again.

"The fact is that most of what I hear in church strikes me as unreal, or else foolish, and often untrue."

You spoke in a tone of apology and I thought you were talking about what you heard from the pulpit. I was in no position to make any defense of what is said there. Fortunately, or unfortu-

nately, for myself, I very seldom hear a sermon. When I am in church I am usually not a listener but the preacher. Thinking of how my own sermons must strike other people I was quite ready to agree with you. It is likely enough that most of what is said in pulpits seems to men like you unreal and foolish and untrue. I am sure that I should feel the same if I were a layman, and especially if I were, as you are, busily occupied all the week with definite, concrete things.

When I still remained silent, having no defense to offer either of my own sermons or those of any one else, you spoke again. This time you said something which showed me that you were not thinking only about sermons.

"For instance," you said, "how can any reasonable man believe in the resurrection of the body?"

Then I understood that it is not only

the foolishness of preachers which annoys you. You find the Creed itself, or some parts of it, unreal and foolish and untrue. Being in that position you wonder, I suppose, whether you have any right to go to church at all, even perhaps whether you are justified in calling yourself a Christian.

Why did you make that confession to me on that particular day after taking part in that particular service in the morning? You had knelt at the altar rails and received the consecrated wafer, which, so we are taught to believe, is to the faithful the Bread of Life. You had put your lips to "the Chalice of the grapes of God." Was your confession an act of intellectual honesty? Your presence at that service was a joy to me. Perhaps you wanted to prevent my misunderstanding your action, taking it to mean more than it really did mean. You did

not wish me to think that you accepted without questioning or doubt the Christian creed. As an honest man you felt bound to make your position clear to me. If that was all, your words were well spoken and I thank you for them.

But I think you meant more than that. You spoke of going to church for the sake of awakened memories and old associations. It seemed therefore that you wanted some memories awakened. What memories? I suppose they are memories of religion when it meant something more to you, or at least something different from that which it means now. And your "old associations"? There is something in our religion with which you still wish to be associated. You can not believe in the resurrection of the body; but you wish to be associated with those who do. Perhaps you wish

to be associated with Him, of whom we read that His body rose again the third day.

You spoke, not truculently, but wistfully; so I think I am right in supposing that you want to come to church occasionally if you may, and be a Christian if you can.

But why did you make your confession to me of all men? Were you wondering how I feel and think about these matters?

"I, not a fool you choose to think,
Must find believing every bit as hard."

You give me credit for possessing some intelligence, and you know that I must have given a little thought to the subject of our Christian belief. You also think, I hope, that I am intellectually honest. Yet you see me still a priest. You hear me say that creed to one of the clauses of which you spe-

cially object. From time to time you listen to my preaching, and even if I never say anything in my sermons about the resurrection of the body, and never mention half a dozen other difficult things, my standing in a Christian pulpit at all implies that I believe in them. You wonder how I do it.

I do not suspect you of that kind of contemptuous curiosity which sent Gigadibs—that egregious literary man of Browning's—to seek his interview with Bishop Blougram. If I thought that any such motive was at the back of your little confession of unbelief, I should simply refer you to the poem and let you chew on the philosophy of that brilliant old cynic of a bishop. You would deserve nothing better of me. And if you came out of the experience as chastened in spirit as Gigadibs was, that would be all to the good.

But you are no more Gigadibs than

I am Blougram, and if you want my confession of faith it is perhaps because you think that what I can do you may be able to do too, if you know how. If I get—as plainly I do—something more out of the church services than revived associations and awakened memories, if I manage somehow to say the creeds you boggle at, I must have succeeded in getting round, or through, or over, the barbed-wire entanglement of dogma which holds you up.

It is true that you did not in so many words ask me to help you to be a Christian any more than you asked me for a statement of my own faith. I am sure that the very last thing you wanted of me was a rehash of Christian apologetics. If you wanted that I could not give it to you for I have never found the current arguments in favor of Christianity particularly con-

vincing. But it is possible that I may be able to help you a little if I tell you how I think about the questions that trouble you, and how, thinking as I do, I manage to stay where I am, say the Creed, serve at the altar, and preach in the name of Him whom I call my Master.

This is a very hard thing to do and a thing I dislike doing so much that I shall only attempt it in a sideways fashion. In the letters which I hope to write to you I shall not say plainly: "So I believe, and for such reasons." To ask me or any man to do that is to ask too much. I shall rather put things in this way: "So a man might believe and such considerations might influence him." Even when I use the first personal pronoun and say "I" you must take that as a writer's trick and not suppose that I bind myself by the words which I put into my own mouth.

Before I begin what you can call if you like my apologia, I want to offer you what is meant in English by an apology.

What right have I to assume that I can influence your beliefs and unbeliefs in any useful way? Am I not guilty of something worse than bad manners if I intrude into your spiritual life; of actual indecency if I strip off the rags which I have succeeded in wrapping round my own soul and display it naked to you and to others? Of course, being a clergyman, it is my duty to preach. But according to your code and mine I ought not to preach except at proper times and in proper places. It is intolerable that I should come the parson over you in private life and insist on talking to you about things which make you hot and uncomfortable. The schoolboy's objection to what in my day used to be called

"Pi-jaw" is perfectly well founded. No man, not even a house master, has a right to corner any other human being and inflict that kind of talk on him when he can not escape and must, in mere politeness, attempt some sort of answer.

But that is not in the least what I am doing. Instead of speaking to you —as I might have spoken last summer when you gave me the chance—I am writing to you. I am not even writing private and personal letters to you. If I did that you might feel yourself compelled to read, perhaps to answer. I am going to publish what I write, and publishing is like preaching in some ways. You are not compelled to read a word of what I write any more than you are compelled to listen to a preacher. You can lay down the paper, precisely as you can abstract your attention from a sermon. You need not

feel yourself bound to send any answers to my letters, though I shall be pleased if you do. You need not even tell me that you have received them. When you get them they need be no more to you than they will be to the printer when they pass into his hands or to the proof-reader when he has to deal with them.

II

YOU have acknowledged my letter. You have given me permission to preach to you, promising to be a member of my congregation. You have even promised to read what I write. You hold out some hope that from time to time you will write to me in reply. All this, my dear S, makes my task pleasanter and easier than it might have been. It is encouraging to feel that I shall not be shooting my arrows vaguely into the air. I shall be saved from that if you tell me plainly when you think I am writing what is unreal or foolish or untrue. I shall not be in the least offended if you tell me this. Only I ask you to believe that, however they strike you, the things I write are quite real to me and as near the truth as I have any hope of getting.

Whatever difficulties trouble us about certain Christian beliefs, there are other beliefs about which you and I have no doubts at all. You find it impossible, so you tell me, to believe in the resurrection of the body. You may find it equally impossible to believe that Jesus Christ was born of a pure Virgin, or that He was anything more than a pious Jew, gifted with an unusual spiritual insight. I do not know your mind on these points. But I do know that you believe in goodness. You are quite sure that honor and temperance (by which we mean self-restraint) and truthfulness and courage and kindness are admirable; and that meanness and lust and lying and cowardice and cruelty are hateful. About these things you are sure, sure with a certainty beyond that reached by a mathematical demonstration. Some Einstein of the future may knock the

bottom out of Euclid and show us that the third side of a triangle is sometimes greater than the other two. The thought of such a possibility does not disturb us in the least, nor would our lives be much changed if the proof were offered us to-morrow—and we understood it, which in my case is unlikely. We can easily imagine such an upsetting of our beliefs about triangles. But we can not imagine any one ever proving to us that cowardice is better than courage, or theft than honesty, or that the weakness of the drunkard is to be preferred to the strength of the man who is master of himself.

I am not much concerned with the origin of these beliefs of ours, the grounds of what we may call our faith. Only I think it is clear that we do not reach this faith by argument. We do not believe that honesty is admirable,

because it is the best policy. Sometimes—indeed often—it is not the best policy and there is more to be gained by dishonesty. We do not believe in temperance because it is the best way of avoiding pain. It may be. Generally, I suppose, it is. But it may also be that intemperance is the best way of getting pleasure, and that the pleasure so secured will greatly outweigh the following pain, even if the pain follows, and that is not certain. These things are at least arguable; but even if the arguments go against virtue and it is shown that dishonesty pays best and that the intemperate man gets most out of life; our belief in the superiority of honesty and temperance will not be shaken at all. It does not depend on considerations of prudence or advantage. We do not merely believe, we *know* that the man who through cowardice and by means of cunning

managed to shirk his duty and stay at home during the war is a base man. He may be as rich as Croesus to-day, may have bought himself a title wherewith to conceal his name and may be able to show every kind of advantage over some maimed soldier. But all that will not convince us that he is a fine man. We know that he is not and nothing ever will or can change our minds about him.

But—I think I may go a little further—your conception of virtue does not stop short at courage, temperance, honor and the rest of the things which the best kind of men everywhere and at all times have considered desirable. You recognize with just the same certainty that love is better than hate, not only sweeter and more beautiful, but in the end more powerful. You agree, I am sure, with every word of Saint Paul's great eulogy of love, and

would say with him that all else, without love, is sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. You feel sure too that sacrifice is nobler than gain. Neither you nor I may succeed in actually loving our enemies or repaying spite with kindness, but we know that we should be better men if we did. We may—alas, we do grasp greedily far too often and hold on tenaciously to our rights and gains. But in our hearts we have no doubt that to give up is better.

Therefore it seems to me that in these matters we hold the faith of Jesus Christ. Our conduct may be and is far different from His, but our belief is the same as His, for these are certainly the things in which He believed; all the strong and beautiful pagan virtues, and besides, the supreme excellence of love and sacrifice. You may say if you like, as many men do say, that the records which we have of

His life are full of fairy tales, that He did not really raise the dead or still a storm. Such stories and your belief or unbelief in them are nothing to our present purpose. If He lived at all—and there seems no reason to doubt that—He was above all others One who believed in the power of love and recognized self-sacrifice, even Calvary, as life's greatest possibility. Because you and I, though only feebly and fitfully, do believe in the greatness of love and the value of sacrifice, we hold His faith and have the right to call ourselves His disciples.

I put it to you this way. Suppose that He is to-day what the Church says He is, God of God. Suppose that He is really coming again to judge the quick and the dead; is it conceivable that He would chase from His presence men like you who believe just what He gave His life to teaching, be-

cause you do not believe in the resurrection of the body, or this, or that, or the other thing, which the Church in its creeds has chosen to emphasize? Unless He is wholly other than what we think He is, from what the gospels show Him to have been, He will welcome and not reject men of your faith.

Or suppose He were to come again, not in glorious majesty, but as He came before, in deep humility. Suppose that, passing along our streets, He saw you as He once saw Saint Matthew, seated at an office desk, or found you, like Saint Peter, mending nets. Suppose He said to you as He did to them, "Follow Me." What would you reply?

"I will not, for I do not think Your ways either good or wise. I am convinced that selfishness is better than love, and I am sure that gain is wiser than sacrifice. My faith is not at all

the same as Yours, for I believe in force, and money and the rulership of the weak by the strong."

I do not see how He could take you for His friend if you answered thus. He could not, even if you accepted without questioning every dogma propounded by every church and believed all the stories of all the miracles wrought by all the saints. You and He could not walk together because you would differ about the very meaning and purpose of your lives.

But suppose you answered this way:

"I am willing to follow You, or to try to follow You, if You will let me; for Your ways are the best I know. But I must make it clear that I do not believe that You were born of a Virgin, or gathered the fish into Peter's net, or called Lazarus from the grave when he had been four days dead."

Jesus might look a little sadly at you

if you spoke thus, but that would only be because you thought such beliefs and unbeliefs of great importance. Because you think His ways are the best He would have a smile of welcome for you. For you and He, servant and Master, might walk together along the road which leads to Calvary. Why not, since you both believe that the cross is a greater thing than Herod's kingly crown or Pilate's command of legions of Roman soldiers?

But here a great and real difficulty faces us. In actual fact—whatever we believe—you and I are not shaping our lives after His model. He was worse off than the foxes or the birds, for they have holes to lie in or have built nests for themselves; while He was a homeless wanderer. But you and I have seen to it that we are provided with good food and soft beds and warm houses and pleasant ways of living.

We may talk about our admiration for His life. In feebly sentimental moods we may believe it to be great and beautiful. But we have not the slightest intention of living in that way ourselves. We do not act as if we believed in Him. We act as if we believed in Mammon. Let us above all be honest with ourselves. If He came to us as we have just supposed and said to us, "Go and sell all you have and follow Me," we should not obey Him. Like the young man in the gospel to whom He did so speak we should go away. We should be sorrowful perhaps; but certainly we should not follow. We should go.

Certainly? Are we, can we be quite sure about that? He has not, so far, made any such demand of either you or me. He does not ask every one to make this supreme renunciation. Indeed He seems to ask it only of a few

of all those whom He calls to Him. Lazarus, who was spoken of as the friend of Jesus, kept his home in Bethany and lived there with his sisters, as it seems in modest comfort. That Joseph of Arimathea who provided the sepulchre for the Lord's body, was a rich man, yet he was a disciple. Jesus did not ask of them what He has not asked of us. Can we be quite sure that we should refuse Him if He did? Unless the call actually comes we may at least hope that we should respond to it and not make the great refusal by turning away. Meanwhile we may be humbly thankful that we are only called to walk in lower, easier ways. For the sons of Zebedee, the drinking of the very cup of which He drank, and perhaps to sit on His right hand and His left in the Kingdom. For us, the wine made from water at one of life's feasts where men were merry

and glad. We shall not grudge the higher destiny to those who walk the harder road. It is enough for us, far more than enough, that He smiles upon our lives and makes them glad for us.

I spent a little while last summer in Switzerland among the Alps. There were others with me who went climbing, roped together, over dangerous heights. I myself felt no strong desire to scale the towering peaks or set my feet on the long, shining fields of lonely snow. I had not the strength for such enterprise. I shrank from the toil. I recoiled from the danger. While I was there I only walked along the valleys among the villages, or at farthest over the lower hills and along well marked paths. Yet I was awestruck and my heart was lifted up at the vision of the great heights. I wondered and adored. But I was glad that no impulse compelled me to go climbing.

Take my little parable. The Master walked serene in those lofty, pure solitudes. The climber saints toil after Him. We may never do as they do, as He did, but we do not call them fools or Him a madman. We recognize the splendor of the heights, though our feet will never tread them. Because we believe in the greatness of their ways and His we have a right to reckon ourselves in some sense of their company and as His disciples. Nor can any man take this right from you, even though, as you say, there are many things which you do not believe.

Do you remember what happened to the Apostle Thomas at the first Easter season. He was not present when the Lord appeared to the others in the upper room. When they told him their good news he refused to believe it. His difficulty seems to have been the very one you mention, the resurrection of

the body. "Except I shall see in His hands," he said, "the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." If we may trust Saint John's Greek as a true translation of the words, Thomas said not only "I do not believe," as you do; but "I'm not willing to believe. I do not want to believe." Yet a week afterward when the disciples were together again in their upper room Thomas was with them. I do not press upon you the story of what happened then or how the assurance he deemed impossible was given to Thomas. I only want you to realize that Thomas was with them, that he still counted himself of their company, did not find it necessary to separate from them, although he definitely rejected the very fundamental article of their creed. Nor—and perhaps this seems stranger

still to us—did they want to cast him out. If he could stay why can not you? Is there any real need that you should consider yourself cut off from that "mystical Body which is the company of all faithful people"?

III

I AM glad of the assurance which you give me. In spite of the difficulty of believing certain things you wish to remain a member of the Church of Christ if you can. If you were in the position of Thomas, my dear S, you would join yourself to the other disciples in the upper room on the Sunday after Easter, and being there, hope that they would not turn you out. But now, so it seems to you, the position is not so simple. Where are the disciples, and what upper room do they frequent? If you kneel at High Mass at Saint Peter's at Rome are you in the upper room among the faithful? Or are you there if you slip into the Abbey of Westminster and hear the white-robed boys chanting evensong. Or—? Or—? Why go on asking such questions? The

plain fact is that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bodies of Christians in the world to-day and not one of them in the very least resembles the little company which gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem.

To whom are you to go?

It seems to me that no answer can be given to the question when you put it thus; at least no answer can be given which will not at once seem ridiculous through its very arrogance. In the face of the existing state of Christendom it is absurd to say, "This is the Church and there is no other." Men do say just that, I know, but neither you nor I are likely to pay much attention to their assertions.

They seem to be logic-ridden and because they have allowed themselves to be enslaved by syllogisms they have lost sense of the value of facts. "There can be," so their reasoning seems to

run, "only one Body of Christ." We can not interject a *Negatur* there. "Therefore there is only one." The reasoning is irresistible. "And here it is." Ah! We turn a little wearily away, for life laughs at syllogisms in a large, tumultuous way and there are plainly several organizations of Christians—churches—in the world. They are all of them, no doubt, quite unworthy to represent the Master; but it does not appear that any one of them is much nearer the ideal than the others, or indeed that there is much to choose between them in the matter of Christlikeness.

But if you put the question in a different form I think an answer can be given. Or rather many different answers can be given, one for you and me, another for some one else, another for yet a different questioner. We are not travelers in a strange city called

upon to decide between half a dozen different hotels. We are men with homes. Our question is not Where am I to go, but Can I stay? After all, you and I were baptized into a church, taught in it, confirmed in it, have grown up in its ways. There seems no adequate reason why we should leave it and seek another home. On the other hand, there are many good reasons why we should stay. To men of our heredity, with our education, our tastes, and particularly our temperament, it must be the English Church or none at all. There—to the sorrow of others but to our comfort—we find that respect for liberty which is necessary for us if we are to live at all. It is said of the Church of England that she speaks with an uncertain voice, or with two voices which contradict each other, or with half a dozen different voices, so that her teaching is

a veritable discord. She may accept the reproach without blushing, and men such as we are may thank God for the truth which the words caricature.

The Church of England is like England itself, or rather like what England was before democracy began to filch away her liberty. The Church and the land have the same respect for the individual, for his freedom of speech and thought, even for his eccentricities. Perhaps the spirit of the nation has made the Church what it is. Perhaps something in the Church has molded and formed the national spirit. It does not matter which wrought on which. In both there is the same profound dislike of being drilled, regimented, cut to pattern. To us this is a most precious thing. For you and me and for men like us this one fact is sufficient to give a decided answer to the question, What church?

There are other considerations, too. The Church of England has achieved in her ritual and in the language of her devotional literature a sobriety, which to us, educated as we have been in certain traditions of taste and conduct, is satisfying. I do not say—no one could say—that the Church of England never lapses into sentimental emotionalism. Some of the hymns which are popular are sad examples of the very worst that men and women are capable of in this way. Nor do I claim that the surroundings of the worshiper in an English church are always in good taste. A dozen examples of atrocious ecclesiastical ornament leap to the memory at once. But I think it may fairly be said that an educated man is safer in an English church than anywhere else from sentimentalism, tawdriness and the sickening appeal of cheap emotionalism.

This is only to say that to some extent at least the Church of England has conformed to those canons of "good form" which are part—some say the whole—of the education of the English upper classes.

It is easy to reply that the English Church pays the price of her good taste in her failure to make a universal appeal. That, I think, is true. It is easy to call her sobriety dullness and to contrast it with the splendor or the vivid emotionalism that we find elsewhere. That is a mere question of words. What others call dullness may appear to us to be an example of that restraint which is an element in all that is greatest in literature, in art. What matters it that these qualities, whatever you call them, are helpful and even necessary to our religious life? The English Church may be accused of dullness and dryness; but to us she

appears to be remarkable for her singular dignity, gravity and restraint. And these things attract us just as excessive emotionalism, tawdriness and constant appeals to the obvious repel us because we have been educated as we have and have acquired certain standards of taste.

If you and I were dumped down suddenly upon earth from some remote planet and bidden to choose the church to which we wished to belong, we should most likely, being the men we are, choose the English Church for the sake of its liberty, its sobriety, its—oh, for half a dozen other things in it. But in fact—I must repeat this for it is of importance—we are not so dumped down, ready-made men in a strange world. We have been built up, like houses, brick by brick. Memories and associations have grown over us like creeping plants on the walls of houses.

Very many of them have roots in the church of our baptism. If they were torn away, much of us, of our very selves, would be dragged away with them. We should be left not only bare, but shaken, cracked, perhaps tottering. Nor is it at all likely that other plants would ever cover us again or bind together the crumbling walls of our being.

There is, I know, a special appeal made by the Church of Rome to men who are tormented with doubts and questionings. "Accept my authority," she says, "and there will be an end of doubt and intellectual questionings with all their weariness. I offer peace to the tormented soul."

That is a moving promise, perhaps an irresistible appeal—to a tormented soul. But are you tormented? Is the word torment a true description of the effect on you of your doubts and ques-

tionings? If I understand you aright your lack of faith, supposing it is a lack of faith, does not worry you very much. Others may suffer from a kind of spiritual and intellectual itch which keeps them constantly scratching themselves. You are not troubled by any such malady. You sleep quietly at night and have never lain awake for one hour wondering whether you ought or ought not to believe in the resurrection of the body. You eat your meals with an appetite undiminished by any haunting questionings about the literal truth of the Christmas story. Probably very few men do suffer from these paralyzing doubts and questionings. We think their disease is far commoner than it is because the men who suffer in this particular way generally make a great fuss and outcry about it. The fact is that the doubt tortured are not normal, that is to say they are dis-

eased; and most men, whether they doubt or not, are healthy, as you are. The others, the few of whom we hear so much, may be super-normal, men of finer stuff than you and I are made of. I do not know anything about that. The important thing for us is that their case is not ours and the language which describes their experience has little meaning for us.

Your religious doubts and questionings are not like the dim shapes and strange whisperings which used sometimes to keep us awake when we were children, which made us sweat with terror, lying alone in dark rooms. Your doubts are affairs of the daylight, to be discussed and thought about without any terror. To speak of your soul as tormented is altogether to misdescribe your experience. You may be thankful for it. It is fear which makes torment, and fear in re-

ligion is the child of superstition, a form of spiritual malady from which you have never suffered.

But even if you were tortured—as some men no doubt really are—would you accept that remedy?

Imagine yourself standing in front of a chasm which you wanted to cross. A bridge spans it but you are doubtful whether it will bear your weight. You hesitate and fear. You question, argue, doubt. Is it strong enough or is it not? You may in the end venture or you may hang back. But there is one thing which you certainly will not do. You will not hire a man with a barrow to wheel you across. That way of getting rid of your doubts and fears does not appeal to you at all. Your intelligence rejects it absolutely. Your sense of the comic prevents your shutting your eyes and sitting in a wheelbarrow, while the weight on your

doubtful bridge is more than doubled. Even if you were desperately anxious to get rid of your doubts you would not do so in that way. But you are not desperately anxious. Your problem is not how to achieve some kind of belief in the resurrection of the body and half a dozen other things. Probably you do not in the least want to believe them. What you do want is to be a Christian.

The worst of discussion like ours is that when the ground is cleared for a step forward it immediately becomes necessary to take a step back. Having argued round the question of what church it is desirable for us to belong to we find ourselves confronted with this problem: Is it necessary or even desirable that we should belong to any church? Granted that we want to be Christians, would it not be simpler to be Christians by ourselves instead of

associating ourselves with other people in our attempt to follow the teaching of Jesus?

From your point of view there are certain obvious objections to belonging to any church, objections which can not but weigh with you. You have already mentioned one of them. You can scarcely be a member of a church in any useful manner without occasionally taking part in its acts of corporate worship. But the moment you do that you find yourself obliged to listen, with at least a passive acquiescence, to many things which strike you as unreal or foolish or untrue. And these are the very things which are forced on your attention and often flourished in your face like the cloaks which bull-fighters flourish in the faces of their bulls—with very much the same result. Priests and official ministers of all descriptions are very often

uneducated, narrow and without experience of life. They are inclined to assume an authority which you can not possibly recognize, and in their pulpits they say absurd things with an air of assurance which is profoundly irritating. They seem to take a perverse delight in dwelling on the least important parts of their faith and treating them as if they were the foundations, instead of perhaps the grotesque gargoyles, of the whole structure. When you have listened to one of these men for twenty minutes you go home in a bad temper. Your spiritual life has not gained but suffered by your attempt at corporate worship.

You have not said so, but it is quite true that if you are in any real sense a member of a church you find yourself associated with people with whom you are out of sympathy. The most prominent and active members of any church

are often occupied with things which seem to you trivial or even worse. Generally they are busy about collecting money for objects which strike you as undesirable. Often they are much interested in the details of ritual, attitudes to be assumed by priests or worshipers, colors to deck altars with, the millinery and minor esthetics of worship. Perhaps they are chiefly keen on getting the better of some other bodies of Christians, subduing them or humiliating them, flinging terms of reproach about, mostly silly words like Catholic or non-Catholic or schismatic, words which sensible people ought to be able to laugh at, but which yet have a tendency to irritate even the most patient. Very often these eager devotees are active, in and out of season, in making converts for their church, your church, though you are a little ashamed to say so, *the* Church as they will inev-

itably call it. All these activities annoy and disgust you. You are driven to think that it would be easier to live the Christian life by yourself and that the best thing is to keep clear of all churches.

I see just how these things strike you. Indeed I think I know more about them than you do for I have been much more closely associated with them than ever you have. But you will readily admit that they are only accidents. A priest may be foolish and self-important to the pitch of actual absurdity; but that is not because he is a priest. It is because he is a poor kind of priest. A zealous churchman, who is generally a churchwoman, may be absorbed in trivialism or may be possessed by the unclean spirit of sectarianism; but it can not possibly be association in the endeavor to follow Jesus which makes him so. His

faults are the failures, not the natural fruits of his churchmanship.

At the very worst—you will gladly agree with me here—it is only some clergy who are foolish and only a few who pose as Sir Oracle at the opening of whose mouth no dog may bark. Behind the trivial fussiness of some Christian people you will find if you look for it a quiet self-denial, a gentle courage, a patient devotion to duty, which put you and me to shame. Even if you do not look for them and scarcely want to find them these beautiful virtues will force your recognition in the most unlikely places. Even behind the sectarianism, that enthusiasm for *the* Church (which never means anything but *my* Church) there is discernible a steadfastness and a loyalty which go far to redeem the hideousness of the form in which they express themselves.

It must, I am sure, be a sign of something bad in us, some pettiness or peevishness, if we are blind to the better things which are there along with all the fussiness and narrowness which offend us. Our contemptuous condemnation of people whose ways and manners—often it is only their manners—offend us, witnesses to the existence of an arrogance in us which is certainly alien to the spirit of Christ.

I listened one day to a curate who propounded from the pulpit some obscure theory about the nature and person of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He seemed quite certain that he knew all about the matter and equally certain that we should all perish miserably if we did not believe exactly what he said. He little understood the magnificence of the gospel which he ought to have been preaching. But if you and I despise him——! "Take heed that ye

despise not." Besides, how do we know? In spite of the queer twisted mentality which made his doctrine of the Virgin Mary seem supremely important to him, the man may very easily have been much better than we are, gentler, more loving, less selfish. If so we should gain by association with him and the closer we get to him the better; yes, even if his knowledge of heavenly things is so complete that he is able to tell us, with the confidence of one who is quite sure, how the Archangel Gabriel has his eggs cooked on days of abstinence.

IV

YOU agree with me, my dear S, as I felt sure you would. We must not cut ourselves adrift from good people merely because they are boring and annoying, or because their goodness assumes unlovely forms. But it appears that in what I have written I have missed your real point. When you complained that no body of Christians in the world now resembles in the least the apostolic company you did not only mean that the modern churchman is a long way inferior to Saint Peter. You meant—I think I understand you now —that the Church as we see it, any church, is wholly different in its very nature from the band of men and women who followed Jesus, mourned His death and rejoiced at His resurrection. It seems to you that no body of Chris-

tians can be regarded as the legitimate descendants of those disciples and that no church can be regarded as the proper development of that little company. You now put this question to me plainly: Did Jesus Christ mean to found or want to found a church at all?

In reply, I admit at once that there is very little in the Gospel narratives which would lead us to suppose that He intended to do any such thing. He seems to have expected that a few men, very few, would be attracted by His teaching and possessed by His spirit. They would naturally be drawn together by their community of spiritual experience and would be united by a love for one another and a common love for Him. They would be in the world in so far as they would live the ordinary life of men, working and playing, rejoicing and sorrowing; distinguished from those around them by

their gentleness and meekness, above all by the fact that they would not be very eager for the riches which others seek, because their treasure, that on which their hearts are set, is not on earth but elsewhere.

Jesus does not seem to have wished or to have supposed it likely that His followers should form corporations, possessing huge wealth, achieving such power that they could impose their will on kings. It seems wildly improbable that He anticipated the existence of churches, called by His name, which in their eagerness for wealth and power would set His cross on the banners of armies, and in order to maintain His cause would resort to force, conquest, bloodshed and oppression. That, unless His teaching has been wholly misrepresented, is the very last thing He would wish His followers to do.

Yet this is exactly what happened.

There are no wealthier corporations in Christendom than the churches of Christ, and there are none more jealous to safeguard their possessions. At times the Church has exercised immense political power, relying, as the state must rely, on force as the ultimate sanction of law. Even to-day, when we are told that the power of all churches has waned, wise statesmen will take account of the opinion of the Church in their countries before they legislate. History is full of instances, even quite modern history contains them, of how kings and statesmen who venture on conflict with the Church commonly come by the worst of it in the long run. Christian bishops and other church leaders are among the great men of the world, sometimes exercising direct political power, always possessing great influence. It is reckoned a thing to be praised in the lead-

ers of the Church that they are statesmanlike, that is to say, skilful in the art of imposing their wills on people by political means. It is considered almost necessary in a bishop that he should be a good man of business. And all this is quite right and proper. Men in the position of directors of a corporation like a great church ought to be statesmen and financiers. If they are not, the churches they represent will lose influence and be impoverished.

I remember reading somewhere a theory that Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master in order to force Him to accept the position of King of the Jews and to raise the standard of revolt against the Roman power. If that theory is correct Judas was the first Christian politician. He also appears to have been the best financier among the Apostles. In view of the development of the Christian Church since his time it

seems as if he and not Saint Peter should be the patron saint of prelates and prince bishops.

Perhaps this will strike you as an exaggerated thing to say. Yet if we consider carefully what Jesus was, how He lived and how He taught; if, further, we read a few chapters of the history of the Church, at almost any period of its existence; or if we view the position of the Church in Europe to-day we shall find ourselves tempted to say that so far from being the visible Body of Christ in the world the Church is something much more like the body of Anti-Christ. I can understand your thinking and saying that the Church is the arch-apostate, and that it is therefore better for you and me and for all who sincerely desire to be Christians to keep out of the Church altogether.

Have I stated your case fairly for

you? I have tried not to understate it or to minimize the force of your criticism of the Church. And this has not been very difficult for me, because I find myself in agreement with a very great deal of what you say. Yet I think we must consider something else besides the violent contrast between the Kingdom not of this world, in whose budget treasures elsewhere are reckoned as wealth, and the arrogance of those rich corporations which desire to govern governments. What we must consider is this:

The development of the Church into a world power was inevitable.

Unless the Gospel of Christ had failed altogether and the knowledge of His teaching had died out of the world nothing else could possibly have happened except what did happen.

The moment the Gospel won the hearts of men, as it did at once in all

sorts of places, some kind of organization of those who professed to be disciples became necessary. Christians felt themselves to be, and were recognized by outsiders to be, members of a society. And a society must have rules if only to settle who are members of it and who are not, and how members are to behave on the occasions of their meeting. No society can exist for very long without the possession of corporate property. Even a dining club must have a minute book, and funds enough to defray postage, funds which are the common property of the members and administered by some one in the position of a trustee. The earliest Christian societies came quite naturally and inevitably to possess property. We know that they had funds for the relief of the necessitous. They kept, doubtless as very precious possessions, the letters which were written to them

by Apostles. They obtained copies of the Gospel records of the Lord's life when these were available. Most of them must have owned buildings, or at least rooms in which they met for prayer and mutual exhortation. Gifts are the natural expression of devotion, and as time went on the churches must have received many gifts from their members. All this was corporate property, held by the communities and administered by trustees on their behalf.

Once these things happened—and they were bound to happen—the Church came into direct touch with the world. It owned property and was therefore obliged to safeguard its property, accepting the aid of the state and relying, in the last resort, on civil law to defend its possessions.

Moreover, its members had civil rights and these also had to be defended.

What more natural, more inevitable, than that they should be defended by the corporation? They must have been wherever and whenever the Church was not regarded as an illicit secret society outside the protection of the law. Very soon the Church began to have political influence. Highly placed converts pleaded her cause in the courts of emperors and governors. When large numbers of converts existed in any place, legislators and administrators were forced to consider Christian sentiment, and its existence became a factor of growing importance in politics. The Church, almost from the very first, was not, and what is more could not be, a Kingdom not of this world. The long-continued process of secularization began directly the missionary enterprise of men like Saint Paul had any measure of success.

Also, and this was quite inevitable too, the Church could not rest content with regulating the lives of those who were in her fold. She began to interfere with the pagan society roundabout her. In the interests of purity and righteousness she was bound to interfere, as she has gone on interfering ever since, with public spectacles and certain social relations. It was not sufficient to say, "Because we are Christians we refuse to countenance by our presence certain shows." Or "If we are Christian men and women we will not live in unsanctified unions with each other." The Church went further and had to go further. She said: "Such shows are not to be tolerated even by pagans. Such and such relations between men and women must be publicly discountenanced."

You see what happened. The Church refused to rest content with

her original mission of bringing souls to Christ to be saved. She endeavored to improve society itself. That was a necessity laid upon her which she could not avoid. Half consciously at first, with clear knowledge afterward of what she was doing, the Church accepted a new mission and set to work to establish a Christian civilization.

In reality, I suppose, the phrase "Christian civilization" is a contradiction in terms. There never can be such a thing, because civilization is exactly what Christ and His Apostles meant by "the world," and Christianity—the Kingdom not of the world—is what Christ set over against it.

"The merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones and of pearls and fine linen, and purple and silk and scarlet, and all thine wood and all manner of woods, of ivory and all manner of vessels and precious wood and of

brass and iron and marble, and cinnamon and odours and ointments, and frankincense and wine and oil and fine flour and wheat and beasts, and sheep and horses and chariots and bodies and souls of men and all things goodly and dainty."

There it is, civilization as Saint John saw it, and what he has to say about it is this: "Come out of her, my people."

How, when we come to think of it, can the people of the beatitudes, the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the persecuted, possibly be the creators and preservers of what Greece meant or Rome meant or modern France and England mean to-day by civilization?

Yet the idea of a Christian civilization is a very noble one for which men might well be content to toil and fight and die. It is so great an idea that its very magnificence almost compels us to believe in it. It is small wonder that

the Church went all lengths to realize it, showing herself ready to use the world's methods, the world's power, even the world's force, for the world's good.

Jesus Himself refused to allow the people to make Him king; although kingship must have seemed then as it has seemed ever since the shortest and surest way of establishing a Christian civilization. The Church has been of another mind. She willingly accepted the scepter which slipped into her hands from the failing grasp of the Cæsars. Everywhere she has steadily striven for world rulership—kingship in all but name.

From the top of a high mountain the devil—who is called the Prince of this World—showed Jesus all the kingdoms and the glory of them. "To Thee," he said, "will I give all this authority, for it hath been delivered unto me and to

whomsoever I will I give it." With that authority Jesus might no doubt have ruled the kingdoms of the world for their good and made Christian states of them. In other words He might have established a Christian civilization. But there was a condition attached to the offer. "If Thou wilt fall down and worship me." That is to say, I suppose, "If Thou wilt accept my ways and work by my methods." Jesus refused. The Church accepted the authority for the sake of the splendid use that she could make of it.

Yet—and this is the thing to keep steadily in mind—the Church could not help herself. It never was for her at any moment a matter of choice. By the very facts of her existence and her growth she was forced to become the thing which seems to us almost anti-Christian, a kingdom and an authority of the world.

V

"YET the difficulty and the contradiction exist, and you make them no better by saying that they are inevitable." So you write to me, my dear S; and add: "From what you say it would appear all the more necessary that those who wish to be Christians should keep out of the Church, out of every church."

You and I are not the first men who have been faced with this difficulty. The beginnings of the secularization of the Church, her acceptance of world methods, coincide exactly with the growth of another movement within her. Christian monasticism emerged into the light of history as an important factor in the life of the Church just as the conversion of Constantine marked the first mile-stone on the road of secularization. As the Church it-

self became more worldly, devout members of her communities withdrew from her a little and gave themselves to what afterward came to be called specially "the Religious Life." There were no doubt many influences at work in the souls of the men who went into the Nitrian Desert as hermits or bound themselves by rules in monasteries. Often there was a belief in the value of asceticism, as a kind of virtue in itself; a belief which may have found its way into Christianity from eastern religions. Often men must have been tempted to seek the peace of solitude through mere *tædium vitæ*, the exhaustion of bodies worn with fierce living reacting on the spirit. Despair of a society which seemed to be tottering to destruction through its own incurable corruption must have sent many timid souls into desert cells and the monasteries. But I am convinced

that what gave monasticism its great impulse was the sense of the contradiction between the ways of the Church which stood behind the Emperor's throne and the ways of Christ who said, "My kingdom is not of this world." It was the best who felt this contradiction most keenly. It was they who established Christian monasticism.

As time went on two things happened. Certain forms of monasticism disappeared exactly as the Church would have disappeared if she had failed to organize herself. The life of the Nitrian Desert did not survive; and: Organized monasticism went the way of the organized Church and became secularized. In time mitered abbots became as dukes, and men vowed to poverty the trustees of vast wealth. The whole history of monasticism is the history of the renewal of the original spirit in the face of repeated secu-

larization. Old orders reformed themselves again and again, making effort after effort to realize the "kingdom not of this world." New orders sprang into existence. Always the inspiration seems to have been the same, the burning desire to get away from worldliness to the unworldliness of Christ.

The problem which faced these men was exactly yours. They saw, as you do, the contradiction between the ways of the Church and the ways of her Master. They must have been inclined, just as you are, to leave the Church and try to follow Christ by themselves. Indeed this is what some of the early hermits practically did. But the majority of those who adopted the "religious" life did not do so. They effected a kind of compromise. They endeavored to be *in* the Church without being *of* the Church. Some instinct perhaps, or perhaps experience itself,

warned them that isolation, even if it enabled them to escape the offense of worldliness, would be fatal to their spiritual life.

I have long believed that we should discern behind the Protest Reformation and the dissident sectarianism of Northern Europe since the sixteenth century, a fresh series of efforts to escape from the dilemma of the contradiction between the Church and Christ. Of course there were fierce doctrinal controversies, and the literature of Protestantism, emphasizing the work of theologians, has misled us about their importance. The common men, who are the strength of any movement and the real substance of any church, are not greatly moved by wrangling and disputation which they have neither time nor education to follow and understand. No doubt also the history of Protestantism has been to some ex-

tent made by the ambition of kings and princes. They discerned chances of political gain and territorial aggrandizement when the world was in the middle of a profound spiritual upheaval. They engaged in what are called wars of religion. But men, though they will give their bodies, are not commonly willing to sacrifice their souls to make their kings or their countries great. A war of religion must have something more behind it than the schemings and ambitions of princes. What gave the Reformation force, what gave vitality to the countless sects of Protestantism was the same thing which sent the hermits into the deserts of Egypt and brought men flocking to the Benedictine monastery. It was the sense of the intolerable contradiction between the worldliness of the Church and the unworldliness of Christ.

Yet none of these men was able, any more than the hermits and monks were, to pursue their course as Christians without association and organization. They could and did break with the visible Church whose ruler occupied a throne in Rome, but they could not escape from the necessity of belonging to a church. All they did was to establish other churches which at once acquired wealth and power, just as all churches must, and underwent the inevitable process of secularization. They would not, because they could not, do without a church.

You see where this line of thought leads us. Men have tried before now to escape from a secularized church, whose politics and commerce seemed to hinder the spiritual growth of the soul, to be perpetually putting stumbling-blocks on the road to following Jesus. They failed to escape. All

through the centuries of the Christian era they have been continually trying and continually failing. Is it likely, then, that you and I can succeed if we cut ourselves adrift from organized Christianity and set forth on a lonely pilgrimage? The whole weight of a large accumulation of experience is against the wisdom of making such an experiment.

And are not you yourself a witness to the need of remaining within the Church? You said that you joined in the common worship of Christians, with whom you have little sympathy, for the sake of old associations and the awakening of memories. You spoke of these as if they were very unimportant things. But are they? I am more inclined to think of them as things essential or at all events very valuable to the spiritual life. They are what the bark is to the tree. Cut off the bark with a knife. It seems at first as if

you had done little harm to the tree. The roots are still down in the earth. The stem stands as firm and strong as ever. The branches stretch out and for a while at least spread their leaves to the sun and the rain. But very soon, if the bark is stripped off the stem, the leaves wither, the branches die and the whole tree perishes. I think it is just that way with the memories and associations which you seem inclined to undervalue. No more than the thin envelope of bark on the tree stem do they seem to matter much. But if they are stripped away——!

A few days ago I was talking to a woman who told me that she never listened to the collect for the First Sunday in Advent without recalling the vivid emotions of a schoolgirl during the last few weeks before the Christmas holidays. She is an old woman and she is childless. Since her

school-days she had no special reason for looking forward to Christmas holidays. It was to the very far-off days of her own childhood that her memory went back when she listened to that collect. Though her hair is white, though she has suffered much in life, she felt again the joy, the expectation, the sense of mystery, the strange romance which fill the heart of a child at the coming of Christmas.

I suppose it is something like that which you mean when you speak of awakened memories. But many of the memories and associations are much more purely spiritual than that one. They are perhaps memories of days when faith seemed a simpler thing, when devotion was warmer, when aspiration, now almost lost, filled your heart. The sound of familiar words brings back much that is gone. Or is it a tune which moves you, or the

shape and the lights and the shadows of a building, or colors? How would it be with your soul if you cut yourself off from the words and music and the pillars and aisles and gleaming altar crosses? Would you gain or lose? You are your own witness that precious memories would lie unawakened in you and that you would fail to connect the present with the sweeter, lovelier past.

I am going to write something to you now which is likely, I fear, to strike you as unreal or foolish or untrue, just one of the things whose utterance you deprecate.

You have noticed, because you could scarcely help noticing, that certain churches—I mean now the actual buildings of stone and wood—impress us directly we enter them with a sense of some spiritual Presence. They possess a devotional atmosphere. Other churches

impress us in this way far less, or perhaps do not impress us at all. They have not got a spiritual atmosphere, or they have not got it in a high degree. This particular quality in churches does not depend on the beauty of their decoration or the fineness of their architecture. There are churches which, from the artistic point of view, are almost perfect and yet they lack the atmosphere of which we are conscious in other buildings, far less beautiful, poor of ornament, marred perhaps here and there by pious vulgarities. Even less does this atmosphere depend on the splendor of the conduct of the worship in these churches or the beauty of the music. We may miss it while the notes of a Beethoven mass are in our ears, while the stately figure of a bishop, like Solomon in all the glory of his clothes, stands before the altar to bless us. We may get it, the

atmosphere which we call devotional, in some small village church where there can be no splendor of ritual, where perhaps while we are in it no prayer is being made at all.

What this atmosphere does seem to depend on to some extent is the age of the building. Very old churches generally have it though not always. New churches seldom have it. It is never to be found in buildings used only occasionally for religious worship. For instance it required a strong spiritual effort to pray in one of the Y. M. C. A. huts which were used on Sundays as churches during the war. The thing could be done, and of course was done. But it was hard to do. In some dim little church standing in the hallowed acre where it has stood for centuries while the sons and daughters of the village were laid to rest generation after generation under the shadow of its walls, it

is very easy to pray; so easy that, entering the porch and passing along the narrow aisle, it is almost impossible not to pray. It is not art, nor architecture, nor excellence of music, nor decorum of priest and worshiper which makes the difference. They help, no doubt, but without any of them the devotional atmosphere may be there and we may feel it. Are we wrong in supposing that it is there as the result of something which has happened to the church itself, to the actual fabric, something which we may call consecration?

We say that a bishop consecrates a church when with solemn prayers and much blessing he sets it apart to be a House of God. But in truth the bishop only begins to consecrate the church. His act is no more than the first of a long series of spiritual efforts which must be continued for years, perhaps for centuries, before the church is real-

ly consecrated. Indeed the bishop's act, because it is official and therefore formal, is the least important part of the consecration. That end might be accomplished without it. But no real consecration is possible without many other acts not deliberately intended to consecrate at all. Just think of all that has happened, all that must have happened in any old church. Many men and women have come there full of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, laying bare to God eager or anxious hearts.

Often, during the hundreds of years since the church was built, mothers whose sons were going forth to war have knelt there and prayed. Girls, whose lovers were lost to them, have crouched in corners and wept hot tears silently. Old men, their life's work done, have gathered strength for the last adventure and sung their *Nunc*

Dimittis there. Young men, rejoicing, have brought their brides there, walking on flower-strewed pavements, to seek God's blessing on their love. Priests, often alone, have said their office there, or stood before the altar, wrapped in the mystery of the sacrament.

The building, the actual fabric, is saturated with human emotion. Flood after flood of emotion has flowed over it and because all this emotion was directed toward God His presence abides, and the church is indeed His House, consecrated.

Something of the same sort evidently happens to sacred books, liturgies for instance, and to music which is much used in worship, and even to the words of hymns, often very poor in themselves, which yet have become consecrated because many men have used them for the expression of religious

emotion. Neither the literary merit nor the art seems to matter much. Even the meaning does not matter much. The essential thing is the consecration through the frequent use by pious men.

Your confession of the value of associations and memories has led us a long way—much further perhaps than you care to go—into the shadowy land of mysticism. It is very likely, I fear, that you are passing judgment on all this in the words you used before, calling it unreal, foolish and untrue. Yet even at the risk of provoking the protest of your common sense, I am going to venture on giving you an instance of the way in which words have become charged with emotion through long use, even when their actual meaning is vague or misleading.

You will remember, no doubt, the few verses from the Book of the

prophet Isaiah which are read in church as the First Lesson on Christmas Day. You have listened to these words every Christmas Day since you were old enough to go to church. I suppose there are no words which awaken in you so many old memories.

"Thou hast multiplied the nation and not increased the joy. They joy before Thee according to the joy of harvest. . . . Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire; for unto us a Child is born. . . ." Back to us as we listen throng tender emotions. All the mysteriousness of Christmas to children and all the joy; the glad renewing of the ties of friendship and the dear delight of family love; the merriment and jollity of earlier years; and above all the thought of God in-

carnate in the Babe of Bethlehem. How

"Love came down at Christmas:
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign."

All that and a hundred times more, thoughts, memories and emotions not to be described, the words bring back to you. But is it the meaning which does all this? I pass over the fact that the prophet who wrote them had not the faintest idea of conveying to us anything at all of all that his words do actually convey. Our Christmas festival would have had no meaning to him. It would certainly have startled him greatly if he had been told that his words were to be used to describe the birth of a child in a stable in Bethlehem. But altogether apart from anything which instructed and

reverent criticism might have to say about the words the plain fact is that as they stand in the English Authorized Version and as we hear them read they make very poor sense. If those verses about the battle of the warrior mean anything, they mean that the coming of the wonderful Prince of Peace is to introduce a new and worse kind of battle into the world, a fiery battle. That would be a horrible thought on Christmas Day, and not at all what we think or hope about the Son born unto us. Then, how bad it would be to have a nation multiplied and no increase of its joy therewith. And how are we to understand the people of whom the prophet speaks rejoicing with the joy of harvest when we have just been told that their joy has not been increased?

What has happened is, of course, plain enough. Owing to a couple of

most unfortunate mistranslations the prophet's meaning has been obscured and those two verses as we read them make no sense at all. But that does not prevent them conveying to us the Christmas feelings which are so precious. Indeed the whole passage would have much less value than it has if it were accurately and correctly translated into words quite different from those in the Authorized Version. The intellectual gain of knowing what the prophet meant would be entirely outweighed by an emotional and spiritual loss, for such changed words would awaken no memories at all. That is because—or it seems to me to be because—we and our fathers before us have been reading those words in church on Christmas Day for centuries. And how many other men in all sorts of strange and distant lands have been reading them, too? And al-

ways as we read we have wanted to adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Like the fabrics of churches, the phrases of collects and certain simple tunes, these words have been consecrated by pious use.

VI

I UNDERSTAND that what I wrote to you at the end of my last letter made no appeal to you. I was afraid of that, my dear S, and I must try not to offend in that way again. Of course you are much too polite and kind to write bluntly that I was talking nonsense. What you actually did, conveyed as severe a snub. You ignored all I wrote about the consecration of churches and music and words.

"Admitting all you say," so your reply runs, "about the advantage of remaining a member of a church, I can not help complaining that it is made very difficult for men like me to do so. If I go to church—even though I keep my mouth shut during a great part of the service—I am making a kind of tacit profession of faith in things in

which I do not in fact believe. Still more does this happen if I take part in any of the various philanthropic works of the Church. I am placed in this dilemma. Either I must keep aloof from the Church or I must allow my friends to understand that my beliefs are like theirs. I can not be perpetually defining my position."

What exactly do you mean? Does your difficulty lie in the miraculous stories which are read to you in church? You have to listen to an account of the healing of a paralyzed man. Your presence as a member of the congregation—unless you are guilty of the indecency of a protest—implies that you believe the story. Whereas you do not believe it. Is that your difficulty?

That was a very real kind of difficulty fifty, or even twenty years ago. Our fathers, and still more our grand-

fathers, were much troubled and exercised over this matter of miracles. They had a clear line of division drawn between what they called the natural and the supernatural. It either troubled them or irritated them when things happened in their natural world which seemed to them contrary to what they called the laws of nature. We have somehow moved away from that line of thought.

I remember very well an argument conducted in the pages of one of the most prominent of the English periodicals between an eminent man of science and a devout clergyman. The subject of the dispute was the sending of the legion of devils into the Gadarene swine. Those articles were written when I was a young man. Thirty-five years or thereabouts have passed since Huxley's articles and the clergyman's reply appeared in *The Nine-*

teenth Century. Can you imagine such articles appearing now? Would any man of science want to argue on such a subject? Would any bishop reply to him if he did?

The times in which such controversies were interesting are over and gone. We no longer bludgeon each other with phrases like "Laws of nature," because we are uneasily aware that we do not know nearly so much as our fathers thought they did about what the laws of nature are. We are not so keen as they were upon the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, because very few of us would care to say where the one ends and the other begins.

Darwin's doctrine of evolution and the various caricatures of it which were labeled with his name created revolution in religious thought in the middle of the nineteenth century. I

am inclined to think that the investigations of the relationship of mind to matter which are being made to-day are effecting a very much greater revolution in our beliefs. The curious and striking physical effects of hypnotism, the various kinds of faith-healing which are practised and achieve well authenticated results, the amazing effects of auto-suggestion—all these have shaken our belief that the body could only be affected by physical agents. Once we believed that certain effects could be produced on the body by drugs, by quinine, for instance, or opium. That similar results, or indeed any important results, could be produced by the direct action of mind on mind, we either altogether declined to believe; or else set such results apart in a little region of their own and called them miracles, credible perhaps if they happened two thousand years

ago, entirely incredible if they were said to happen in our time and in any society which we know.

Then, in spite of ourselves, we were forced to believe that what men of other generations would have called miracles are really quite common occurrences. Because Mrs. Eddy seemed a somewhat ridiculous person and her disciples were generally bores we did not want to believe in healing by Christian Science. Because some forms of popular piety are vulgar and rather repulsive, we did not want to believe in the miracles of Lourdes. Because other forms of faith-healing are associated with a great deal of silliness we would have greatly preferred not to believe in them. But in the end we could not help believing a little. The cases of healing were too numerous and too well authenticated to be rejected. I myself, and I dare say you, would have pre-

ferred to adhere to the old-fashioned belief in the doctor and his drugs as the only real remedies for our pains and aches. But in spite of our wishes we were forced to modify our beliefs. Indeed we swung off into the opposite extreme of faith and thereby created for ourselves a new kind of skepticism.

At one time we believed that the doctor cured us with a pink liquid in a bottle which tasted nasty. Now we are more inclined to think of the pink liquid and the cabalistic signs with which the doctor described it in his prescription as part of the apparatus by which he hypnotized us back into health. We should get well just as quick if he gave us yellow jelly instead of pink water so long as he described it in equally incomprehensible terms and assumed the same air of benevolent omnipotence when he stood at our bedside. The essential thing in all

healing, so it appears, is to induce a belief in the sufferer that he is going to get well. It does not in the least matter whether that result is achieved by a cheery gentleman with a stethoscope or an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or by assurances, in the name of Mrs. Eddy, that we are not ill at all or by the latest method of saying over and over again, "I am getting better, getting better, getting well."

The fact is that we are coming to be aware of hitherto unsuspected relations between mind and matter. We have not got very far with our new knowledge. We have no reasoned theory of it. We have not ventured to formulate any laws, like the old "laws of nature." We do not in the least understand what is happening. But we are convinced that there is opening before us a vast possibility of new power and new knowledge. We are some-

what in the position of men who have traveled a long way on a road in a dull, monotonous country. We knew that we were getting on, but there was nothing inspiring in our progress. Suddenly, after plodding up a long hill, there opens before us a vast stretch of country in which are mysterious forests, broad, rolling rivers, ancient towers set high on steep rocks, great cities with domes and spires. We neither imagined nor hoped that such things lay before us.

The effect of this new knowledge—if we can call it knowledge yet—on our attitude toward the miracle stories of the Gospels is obvious at once.

I have been assured, and have no reason to doubt, that a woman whom I once knew, escaped the pains of childbirth and all the unpleasant after-results by firm adherence to the teachings of Christian Science, that is to say

I suppose, through some form of auto-suggestion. I can scarcely refuse to believe that some of the people who are said to be healed at Lourdes really are healed. I do not call these things miracles; but that is only because they occur so often that they deserve the name of ordinary. Now if these things are happening roundabout us every day why should we refuse to believe that similar things occurred in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago? We may fairly suppose that Jesus possessed in a very high degree the powers which many men possess to-day. If He was at all the kind of man the Gospels represent it is very likely that He did possess unusual psychic powers. In that case His miracles of healing cease even to astonish us.

There are, of course, other miracles, the stilling of the tempest, for instance, for which we can find no par-

allel in our experience. But surely we must be humble enough by this time to realize that we understand little, if anything, about the powers of mind over matter. Certainly we ought not to be so rash as to set any limit to them. If by the exercise of psychic power Jesus cured paralysis and mania and blindness is it really absurd to think that He stilled the storm or increased the quantity of food in His hands? Such performances are still astonishing. But we are now every day doing things which a little while ago would have seemed equally astonishing. We ought surely to be cautious about using the word impossible even about the raising of the dead.

VII

YOU have sent me, my dear S, an unexpected reply to my letter about miracles. My line of thought, so you say, is far more destructive than the arguments of the old-fashioned rationalists. They did not like miracles, and when they came across the story of one in the Gospels they threw stones at it. Sometimes they aimed their missiles fairly well and gave nasty knocks to the wonder stories. Sometimes they missed their mark altogether, but either way the wonders remained, and if a man chose to say, with Tertullian, "I believe, just because the things are impossible," there was at least something to believe in. The Jesus who ruled nature because He made the world, who could break laws inviolable to others because He Himself had ordained them—that

Jesus was plainly divine, worth believing in if only we could manage to believe, worth worshiping once we had achieved faith.

But I, so you say, have flattened Jesus down. When I have finished with His miracles they are all commonplace affairs; some already seem to be so, some waiting only for the increase of human knowledge to be recognized as ordinary. The Man who wrought them was little more than a Mrs. Eddy or a Doctor Coué born too soon. But nobody wants to make a god of a faith healer, or to proclaim a hypnotist as anything more than a man who has achieved some degree of skill in his particular business. I have left, so you say, no room for faith, for I have left no one in whom it is worth while to believe.

That would be true if Jesus' miracle working was the only important thing

about Him, or even the most important thing. It would be true if we regarded Him as divine because He wrought miracles. Then, indeed, if it were shown than he was nothing more than a scientist a little in advance of His time there would be nothing left to believe in, no possibility of the sublime venture of faith.

It is not faith, in the religious sense of the word, to believe in the skill of the taxi-driver whom I hire to take me from Hyde Park Corner to Shaftesbury Avenue even though I could not possibly drive a taxi myself down Piccadilly and across the Circus. The man undoubtedly has powers and skill which I do not possess, and I believe in them. But I can not call that belief faith, or at least I can not call it religious faith, that is, not the kind of faith which saves.

If faith in Jesus Christ is no

more than that, then you are perfectly right. It is not worth having because it is far too easy a thing to get.

But it seems to me that faith in Jesus' teaching is something far more important and far more difficult than faith in His works. For instance He said:

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Which is more important to believe, that He was right about that or that He healed a blind man?

Which is more difficult to believe?

Men's minds are differently constituted and no doubt others have experience quite unlike mine. But I confess that I do not find it very hard to believe that He healed a blind man, or indeed that somebody else healed a blind man in His name, or in the name of Buddha, or in the name of Christian

Science. Nor does it seem to me a very important thing that I should believe or not believe that. But whether I accept or reject Jesus' judgment about what makes life worthy is clearly a matter of the utmost importance; because my whole outlook and my whole conduct are determined by my belief. The common judgment of the world is that Jesus was totally wrong about this and that the worth of a man's life does depend entirely or almost entirely on the abundance of things which he possesseth.

Moreover the world is evidently becoming more and more convinced that riches are the greatest good and poverty an entirely evil thing. I am not now thinking only of the open and avowed worshipers of Mammon, the men who say simply, and without Iago's sneer "Put money in thy purse." I am thinking of the altruists who do

not want much for themselves, and the philanthropists who want to make other people happy, the better class of statesmen who want to improve the lot of their countrymen. All the efforts of these men are directed to one end. They want to eliminate poverty, to raise the standard of living, to achieve such a distribution of wealth that all men shall have enough. Their way is beset with difficulties and they differ about the means which they ought to adopt to achieve their end; but none of them has any doubt itself. They are perfectly sure that happiness and the worth of life depend on the possession of riches. That is to say they are in definite disagreement with Jesus who said that the worth of life consists in no such thing.

I think that this belief in riches as life's great good and poverty as its extreme evil is a new thing. At least it

is a new thing among the nobler and better kind of men. Our grandfathers did not believe it. They did not direct all their best efforts to the elimination of poverty, as we do, because they did not believe, as our generation does, that poverty is an unmitigated evil. No doubt in their time as in ours poverty was an uncomfortable thing and it was generally more agreeable to be rich, though some of the best and wisest men doubted even that. But it was clearly seen that poverty did not in itself dwarf men and destroy the possibility of living greatly.

It was never, I think, so difficult as it is to-day, to believe that Jesus was right in his judgment of the values of riches and poverty. There were until quite lately, certain beliefs common among men which helped them to realize that riches are not certainly a blessing or always to be preferred to pov-

erty. There was, for instance, the old aristocratic prejudice against making money by trade. It was held, sometimes really held and not merely professed, that a gentleman could not sell in a shop or stand behind the desk in a counting-house without suffering a certain degradation. He might make money these ways but he lost something more valuable than money. This was not Christ's faith, or at all like Christ's faith; but it helped to make His faith less incredible than it is to us, since it taught, as He taught, that there is something more desirable than abundance of possessions.

There was also, really influencing men's minds, a sort of inversion of this aristocratic pride. There was a recognition of the dignity of toil and poverty, a feeling that in some way these made life great. There were proverbial expressions of this faith:

Work apace, apace, apace,
Honest labour makes a lovely face.

And songs, like hymns, about it:

Is there for honest poverty
That hangs his head and a' that?
The coward slave we pass him by.
We dare be poor for a' that.

This was not Christ's faith any more than the aristocratic prejudice against making money was His faith. He taught that life could only be very great by way of poverty, not merely that life might be great in spite of poverty. But now we do not believe even that.

We no longer "dare be poor" because it seems to us certain that all the good in life is for the rich, and only for them. We have lost even those feeble aids to belief which helped our fathers to escape the flat contradiction between the world's teaching and Christ's. We are now face to face

with the contradiction and can not avoid it.

In another way, too, it is harder for us to see any possibility of good in poverty than it was for our fathers. To be poor in a modern industrialized state is, almost certainly, to be condemned to sordidness. The imagination dwells with horror on those long rows of small houses, all exactly similar to one another, which spread like some loathesome skin disease over the land surrounding our great towns. They are the houses not of the destitute and hungry but of those who are poor in the sense that they have small and narrow means. We find ourselves asking whether there can be any good, any greatness or spirituality in lives lived amid such surroundings. The fact that there is food enough to eat and sufficient warmth makes the matter in some degree worse, not better. It is

not difficult, not at all events impossible, to discover a chance of spiritual greatness in the life of a ragged tramp for whom the next meal is a doubtful adventure, on whose wayside bed the summer wind blows warmly sometimes, even if the rain beats often. It is possible to see a certain nobility in the remnants of the old feudal loyalty which attached "the poor man at his gate" to "the rich man in his castle." The lives of the dependents of the great are not necessarily mean. They are redeemed at least by the fact that they are lived in sunshine and fresh air and may be sanctified by kindliness and the dignity of service. But it is not of tramps or gamekeepers or grooms that we think when we speak of poverty, and it is not their lot which moves us to dread being poor as the greatest of evils. What makes it almost impossible to believe in the blessedness of

poverty is the feeling that it condemns men to sordidness and meanness and narrowness, that it cuts them off from all lofty emotion, that it makes it very difficult for those who suffer it to lift up their hearts. The horrible appeal to the imagination made by the poverty of an industrialized society does more than anything else to render Christ's doctrine well-nigh incredible to us.

Nor, I suppose, did riches purchase so much a century ago as they purchase now and it did not seem so self-evident that only the rich or at least the well-to-do could live in any full way. No doubt riches always secured for their possessors a sufficiency of good food and, ever since men achieved any degree of civilization, much material comfort. But it is not for the sake of eating well and sleeping soft that you and the best kind of men desire riches. Indeed so little do these

material goods appeal to you that you are willing at any time to sacrifice them for the sake of sport and adventure. It is not because he can afford to eat *pâté de foies gras* and drink champagne that you call the rich man blessed, or because poverty deprives him of these delights that you call poverty cursed.

What you want when you want riches is chiefly the chance of esthetic and intellectual delights, and only men with money can command these. You want to see the world's great buildings, to sit in the square in front of Saint Mark's in Venice, to dream in the nave of the Church of Pisa, to walk among Moorish pillars and arches in Spain, to gaze on the work of the Pharaohs in Egypt and the buildings of Eastern Princes in India. You want to hear great music worthily rendered, to listen to *Salome* conducted by Richard

Strauss in Vienna or Beethoven's *Sonatas* played by some famous pianist. You want to read and possess the best books and to house them worthily so that the possession of them will be a lasting joy to you. You want to see and sometimes to buy, pictures. You want to be free to wander about in beautiful places, among snow-covered mountains or across tropical seas where coral islands are. More than anything else you desire to mingle in the best society, not the society of titled men if they happen to be fools as well as peers, or that of shallow women even if they glitter all over with diamonds; but that society of able men and great ladies who have gathered wisdom through their association with the truly great in many lands.

All these—and they are not material pleasures or in any way base pleasure—riches can give you. From all these

you are cut off by poverty. And this is more true to-day than ever before, because the delights which riches offer are more numerous now and more accessible than ever before. Therefore to-day it seems as certain as anything can be that it is riches which make life good and valuable, and that its worth does literally depend on the abundance of the things which we possess.

You see how things balance and compensate each other. Our grandfathers found it harder than we do to believe in the miracles of Jesus because of their conviction that they knew all about the immutable laws of nature. We find it harder than they did to believe in the teaching of Jesus because riches seem even better to us than they did to them, far more valuable; and because poverty strikes us as an utterly bad and degrading condition, a thing which they did not believe.

Certainly—and this also must be said—most of us when we desire riches desire them for nobler ends even than the gratification of our own esthetic and intellectual desires. We want to safeguard those whom we love from hardship. We are haunted by the fear of leaving behind us a widow nearly destitute or children who may starve. Poverty puts us at the mercy of evil chance. Riches secure the comfort of those dear to us and rob untimely death of more than half its terror. We want besides to give to those we love the best things which the world affords. I do not mean that a man wants to be rich chiefly in order to deck his wife with jewels and fine silks. He may want to do so, not unworthily. But he wants much more to save her from toil and anxiety and worry. He wants to give his sons the education of one of our great public schools, the

best education which the mind of man has yet devised. But no amount of self-denial will enable a man with four pounds a week to send his son to Winchester. A poor man must forego not only the best pleasures of life for himself, but he must cramp his wife and cut off his children from life's most valuable opportunities.

Can it then possibly be said that riches are anything else but a blessing and poverty anything else except life's greatest evil? Yet, if there is one thing quite certain about Jesus it is this: He taught that riches and poverty do not matter; that a man's life may be great and full and splendid whether he is rich or poor, that if there is any difference it is that the scales are weighted not in favor of but against the rich.

You were inclined to complain that I had reduced Jesus to the level of the

commonplace because I said that His miracles were perhaps really not what we mean by miracles at all. I had left, so you seemed to think, nothing to believe in, nothing worth the effort of faith. For faith must always be an effort, a daring, an adventure, if it is to be worth anything to our souls. Was your reproach just? Does it require no effort, no courage, is it nothing of an adventure to believe Jesus when He says: "Wealth is not what makes life worth living; nor does poverty cut us off from the best there is"?

The whole civilized world to-day agrees that He was wrong. It is an axiom, taken for granted before we do anything for ourselves or other people, that poverty is utterly evil. The whole underlying conception of our civilization is that riches are desirable because it is wealth alone which makes life fine or even tolerable. Is it noth-

ing to fly straight in the face of all the wisdom and accumulated experience of the world and say: "In this matter I take my stand with Jesus"? Surely this is a venture of faith if ever there was one.

So far from there being nothing demanded of us when we cease to regard Christ as a wonder-worker and think of Him only as a teacher there is more asked of us than ever, and faith is so difficult that it is well-nigh impossible.

Yet we are not left entirely without help. There are certain familiar examples of the truth of what Jesus says, and it appears that at least sometimes the world is wrong and He is right.

You have seen a young mother with her babe? Is there any possibility of fuller life than hers? The love of her child possesses her. It raises her to emotional heights undreamed of when she was a girl. To the very full she

lives a life as completely satisfying as life can be. Nothing that the world has to give can add anything to the fulness of her life. Neither art, literature, music nor beauty of any kind whatever can enrich the experience which she enjoys.

Yet neither riches nor poverty has anything whatever to do with this life of hers. Her babe is her babe. It would be no more if she were a princess. It would be no less if she were a beggar. Life for her—all the glory and the greatness of it—does not depend on the abundance of the things which she possesses.

Much rarer is the case of the artist entirely absorbed in his art. Yet there are men who, at certain times in their lives, are entirely absorbed in painting pictures, writing books, making or interpreting music. The thought of the possible material reward of what he

does is, for a while, absent from the mind of such a one. He would do what he is doing even if there were no chance whatever of any one buying his picture or reading his poem. He may be poor but his soul has outsoared the meanness of surrounding things. He lives greatly, passionately. The spirit in him scorches and consumes him with the intensity of its burning. Neither riches nor poverty has anything to do with that kind of life. Indeed if riches were to come to him suddenly it is likely that they would diminish, certainly they would not increase, the greatness and fulness of his living. This kind of life seems actually easier for the poor man than for one with great possessions.

Yet no one will deny that the artist lives as truly and completely as the mother with her babe. In his case, as in hers, the words of Jesus are cer-

tainly true. "His life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

So after all it is possible that Jesus may be right and the world wrong. I do not offer my two little instances as proofs of the truth of Jesus' teaching about riches and poverty. They are very far from being proofs. All I hope and feel about them is that they may help us to realize that Jesus' saying is not so absurd, not so contradictory of all experience as it seemed at first. There are moments and moods in which life is independent of possessions. There is therefore the chance that all life might be, and that in following Jesus we should get, even though we are poor, all and more than all that wealth could give us.

I have written to you about poverty and riches; but plainly this is not the only subject on which the teaching of

Jesus flatly contradicts the teaching of the world. If you read the Beatitudes you will see how often those are called blessed by Jesus whom the world does not think blessed at all; but either despises or pities. The world does not believe, and it is very hard for us to believe, that the poor in spirit are blessed, or the mourners, or those who are persecuted even if it be for righteousness' sake, or that the meek can possibly inherit the earth. And Jesus is quite definite in His teaching about these things. He neither qualifies His statements nor admits the possibility of compromise. It seems sometimes utterly impossible to believe Him. It is as if the venture were too great for any faith to make.

Yet— Is there not something in us which responds to this strange teaching of the Master? Sometimes— who knows why or how?—the divine

which is in all of us speaks and the light of the soul is lit and we know, really know, beyond all questioning, that He is right. The mood passes, the light dies, the loud voice of the world silences the whispering of the God within. We are back again in the wilderness of faithlessness, wandering far from Him. Yet we *have* seen and even when we are farthest from His ways we wish that we could go back to them: well knowing that we should be better, greater, happier men, if we believed.

VIII

"BUT surely," I quote the words of your answer to my last letter, my dear S, "some kind of dogmatic belief is required of me if I am to be a Christian. Even if I set aside the miracle stories as unimportant, must I not believe something definite about Jesus, for instance that He is, as the Nicene Creed says, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God? Must I not believe that and say so? Or can you find a way of absolving me from adherence to these dogmas?"

In reply I am tempted to quote to you part of the speech which Serenus de Cressy made to John Inglesant. You have, I know, read Shorthouse's great spiritual romance. But perhaps you do not clearly remember the passage which I have in mind. When Inglesant

was in Paris, after the death of Mary Collet, he went to the Benedictine Monastery to ask the help and advice of Father de Cressy, whom he had known years before at Oxford. De Cressy said much to him which is deeply interesting and touching. Among other things he said this:

"I do not speak to you, as I might to others, of penalties and sufferings hereafter, in which, probably, you do not believe. Nor do I speak to you, as I might to others, of evidences that our faith is true, of proofs that hereafter we shall walk with Christ and the saints in glory. I am willing to grant you that we may be mistaken, that in the life to come we may find that we have been deceived; nay, that Jesus Himself is in a different station and position from what we preach. This is nothing to your purpose. . . . Better Jesus, beaten and defeated,

than all the universe besides triumphing and crowned."

I might leave the matter there and let this passage serve as a sufficient answer to what you have written me. But I am unwilling to do this because there is something more to be said.

Remember the history of the tremendous statement which you have quoted from the Nicene Creed. How did "God of God" come to be there and to form part of the faith of Christendom? It is not related of Jesus that He ever said this about Himself, nor are the words of the creed or anything like them to be found in the Gospels, or in the writings of the Apostles, or for a long time in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. The Nicene Creed was established as the great symbol of the Christian faith only after the Church had been rent with controversy. Men argued with one another, perse-

cuted one another, hated one another bitterly, because of the different beliefs they held about the nature of Jesus and His relationship to the Father of all. It was only after a series of fierce struggles that the Creed was established as the confession of faith of Christendom.

Consider what that means. Men were Christians, devoted and faithful followers of Jesus, before that creed was made, before any definition of the nature of Christ's sonship was attempted, before the Christological controversies began or were thought of. They were Christians without the Nicene Creed. Men might still be Christians without the Nicene Creed and without its definitions if the question about the nature of Jesus had not been raised. We are told that English Law consists chiefly of decisions made in disputed cases, and very little of writ-

ten statutes. If there had been no disputes there would have been no decisions and therefore no law of that kind. And we should all have got on perfectly well without it—until we began to dispute. So it is with the creeds of the Church. Martyrs died, disciples lived and bishops ruled before any one thought of asking whether Jesus Christ was of one substance or only of like substance with the Father. But once the questions were asked some answer had to be found for them because the men who asked them would not be content without answers.

In the days of the Arian controversy it seemed to people very important that they should have an answer to their question about the nature of Jesus. And it is a mistake to think of the controversy as an affair of doctors and theologians, a mere wrangle of experts in which common people were uninter-

ested. The men in the street in Alexandria wanted to know just what Jesus was, *homoousion* or *homoiousion*. It is very difficult for us to understand how such questions could have been popular and how working men could have been interested in finding the answer. But it certainly was so. Perhaps people felt that they could not go on praying to Jesus until they knew whether He was indeed God of God or only a man very like God. But whatever the prompting impulse was, Christians certainly did want a clear ruling on the point in dispute.

The Church, you see, did not make creeds just for the fun of the thing, or from a perverse desire to annoy men like you who are out of sympathy with dogma. It made them because men would ask questions. All dogmas are simply answers to questions, which were found because they had to be

found. It is quite conceivable that the Church might never have defined the nature of the Lord at all, might have been content to go loving and serving Him without asking just why and to what degree He should be worshiped. There would have been no need to say "God of God" and all the rest of it if the Church's hand had not been forced by people who asked questions.

But we are not now asking the questions to which the Nicene Creed gives the answers. Therefore the answers are not to us matters of pressing importance. You, for instance, are a well-educated man. You have had the advantage of spending your boyhood in one of our public schools and your youth in a great university. You have more than ordinary intelligence and you are deeply interested in Christianity. You have some general idea of what the Arian controversy was about,

but it does not interest you in any vital way. I doubt whether you have any clear idea of what those subtle Alexandrians and Greeks meant by their word *ousia*, a term which became either unintelligible or misleading when the Latins translated it as "Substance." Do you know anything about the Monophysite controversy, or the Nestorian? Probably nothing whatever. Nor do you want to know anything. Your spiritual life does not depend on your thinking rightly about the points raised in those old disputes, or even on your thinking about them at all. And your case is the case of most men to-day. We are, I take it, very much in the position of the Christians of the Ante-Nicene Church so far as these questions are concerned. We have not asked them and do not want to ask them. We are not much interested in the answers which Athasius and Arius

found, or in the formulas which the Church in the end adopted.

The Creed stands and we say it, but I think we may fairly regard its clauses rather as sign-posts set up to warn people off dangerous paths, than as statements of positive truth. There is all the difference in the world between the two. In the one case we assent, joyfully and whole-heartedly, as to Saint John's statement that God is love, because our whole spiritual life depends on our believing that. In the other case we refrain from dissenting, just as we refrain from walking along a path marked "Dangerous," and, having passed the sign-post by, are not otherwise much affected by it. Since you have no desire to speculate about the divinity of Christ, the warnings which the Church gives you about the danger of certain lines of speculation have little to do with you.

A bottle is marked "Poison" with a staring red label. If there is the least chance of your wanting to drink its contents the label is most useful to you. But even if you happen to dislike all drugs and never taste anything that comes out of a chemist's shop the label does you no kind of harm, and there is no need for you to worry yourself about it. It was of vital importance once that Arianism should be labeled "Poison" because at one time people wanted to drink speculative stuff out of every bottle they saw. Perhaps some people still do wish to speculate about such matters as Christ's divinity. If so, the Nicene Creed and its dogmas are their warnings and guides. But you, I think, do not want to ask these old questions over again. Therefore no necessity is laid on you to examine or to understand the answers which the Church found long ago.

IX

"IS the Nicene Creed then simply a useless survival of another age, a thing like the human appendix (also, we are told, a survival,) which the body would be better without, if only the thing could be got rid of any way except by an abdominal operation?"

It is natural enough, my dear S, that you should ask this question after reading my last letter. But if you think enough you will see that the answer is simple enough. Granted that you and others like you do not find the Nicene Creed, or rather certain clauses in it, of value to you either by way of believing or disbelieving, does it therefore follow that it is of no value? Is a thing useless because at a particular moment a certain man, or even many men, or most men, are not using it?

You remember the western bay where you and I used to sail many years ago. At first, before we knew the rocks and islands, we used to study the chart carefully, poring over it at home, snatching hurried glimpses at it as we ran through narrow passages before the wind. I shall probably never sail there any more. It is not very likely that you will. Perhaps neither of us will ever look again at the chart of those waters. But is the chart therefore useless? Was the labor of the man who took the soundings and bearings altogether wasted? Of course not. We used the chart once. Others are using it now even if we are not.

But even if the statements made in the Nicene Creed are of no value to you and never have been, the fact that the Church made the Creed is of the greatest importance. For what the Church did then she has been doing more or

less ever since. She has been answering the questions which men asked. Her answers have never again acquired the dignity of that great Creed; but every doctrine she has promulgated, and every way of thought into which she has led Christian people, have been just what that Creed was, answers to questions which men have asked.

Men will always be asking questions about religion if they are interested in it, and each generation will have, or ought to have, its own questions. That seems certain. If religion is alike in our hearts, our intellects will be curious about it. Therefore the Church must always be finding answers to questions, that is to say must always be making new creeds. Unless the Church has sunk into the torpor of senility she must be doing this and can not rest simply on her old creeds. The

answer to yesterday's questions will not serve the questioner to-day; although no doubt it was a perfectly sufficient answer to the questions it was meant for.

For instance: in our time we have asked questions about Holy Scripture which, for some reason or other, men did not ask before. We want to know just how we are to regard this literature which has got bound up together in one volume and called the Bible. We know something about the history of the various books, how they were written or compiled, their dates and their authorship. This knowledge has set us asking questions, and the most unobservant Christian must be aware that an immense change has taken place, in the course of a single generation, in the way in which men regard the Bible. We still feel, I hope, that this literature is the most precious thing in

the world. God, who speaks in all good writing, speaks specially and most clearly in the Bible. Just here our questionings begin. All very great literature seems to us inspired, inasmuch as the writer is expressing something greater than he thinks or knows, something which comes to him from the outside, from the Spirit. But is the inspiration of the XIIIth Chapter of Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians only something of the same kind as the inspiration of Wordsworth's *Ode to the Intimations of Immortality?* Or is it something as different as the divinity of Christ is from the divinity of men, about whom the psalmist said, "Ye are gods, and children of the Most Highest"?

This is the sort of question which we are asking. The Church ought to be finding an answer. Perhaps she is finding an answer. The history of

the making and accepting of the Nicene Creed ought to teach us patience. Not in a moment or by the word of any single teacher is the answer to a great question given. Stencil plates may be stamped out at a blow, and afterward patterns marked off by them. But wrought-iron work is achieved otherwise. It requires time and fire and many blows. Such, it seems, is the way in which great creeds are made.

We have read much about the necessity of faithfulness to the old creeds. The Church, so we are told, will perish if she lets go her ancient symbols. Perhaps this is so. But the Church will certainly perish unless she occupies herself boldly in making new creeds. Her life depends on her realizing that men are asking fresh questions and must have fresh answers to them. The old answers were well

enough, but we are not in fact asking to-day the questions to which those answers were given.

"What think ye of Christ?" That seems to be a question perpetually repeated, asked by every generation. But think how many different meanings that question has, in how many different ways it is possible to think about Him. In the days of the making of the Nicene Creed and through the following centuries of Christological controversy men wanted to know in what sense they were to regard Christ as God. The Church, travailing, gave birth to her answer—Very God of Very God. At another time men wanted to know how they were to think of Him as their Savior, what did His death on the Cross mean and in what way is He a propitiation for our sins. The Church gave her answer in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo.* Are we

deeply occupied with either of these questions now? It seems to me that we are not. It ought to matter to us, no doubt, but in fact it does not matter much, that is to say, we are not really troubled in spirit about whether He is really God of God or not. It is strange, no doubt, that we have ceased to think deeply and painfully, as men used to think, about sin and the atonement for it. But the truth is that we are not thinking about these things or about Christ in this way.

On the other hand we are thinking about Christ in another way, asking the old question, but in search of a different kind of answer. "What think ye of Christ?" He may be Very God. He may be the propitiation for our sins. But is He also Very Man? Dimly and confusedly you and men of your generation seem to be asking this question: "Can we regard Jesus as the

complete man, the perfect example of all that a man ought to be?"

It is not enough to know that He hungered, thirsted, grew weary and was overcome by sleep. He might have had all our physical weaknesses and strengths, and yet be very far from being a complete and perfect man. Nor is it enough to know that He sorrowed, even wept, that He rejoiced, that He was capable of anger. We sorrow and rejoice, weep and are angry; and it is something to know that Jesus did these things too. But man is capable of more than physical feelings and primitive emotions. We want to know whether Jesus was sufficiently Very Man to share all that we feel and are.

There is, for instance, our artistic faculty. Did Jesus know anything about that? No doubt He was joyfully conscious of the loveliness of nature around Him. When He spoke of the

lilies of the field and their splendid raiment, when He reminded us of the trees putting forth their leaves when summer is nigh, He showed that He observed and appreciated the beauty of natural things. But had He any desire to express all the beauty that He saw in paint, or form or words? That is what artists want to do. Did He? Could He even have appreciated and enjoyed the expression which other men have given to what they saw and felt, the work of the artist? Would He have understood literature or music? It is true that some of His parables are quite perfect in their literary form. No one could improve on the story of the *Pharisee and the Publican*, or of the *Lost Sheep*, or of *The Sower*, by the alteration of a single word. But did He consciously seek this perfection or find any pleasure in it? Was He occupied with literary art at all? He

said: "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden." Would he have understood or cared for the music to which Handel set the words? We do not know. But if He lacked this faculty for art, then in this respect he was less than Handel, less than thousands of other men who have been moved by painting and poetry and sculpture. He is not complete, Very Man, because there is a whole side of our nature in which He has no part.

Could He and did He laugh? We feel sure that He smiled; very kindly at the Marriage Feast in Cana of Galilee, tenderly when He took the little children in His arms. But laughter, full-throated laughter, "holding both his sides," is a different matter. We can not think of a man as complete unless he is able to laugh; not perhaps as Rabelais laughed, though that kind of laughter too is very human, but cer-

tainly as Shakespeare laughed. God Himself no doubt laughs. If He really watches the activities of men He must laugh. Our antics being what they are, a Being, even if He has far less than infinite intelligence, could not possibly help laughing loud and constantly. Yet so far as the Gospel records go, there is not only no sign that Jesus ever laughed, He is not represented as the sort of man who would be at all likely to laugh. But a man who can not laugh is cut off from a whole range of human emotion and is therefore imperfect. No matter how great and strong and brave and good such a Man may be—even if he is as earnest as a young intellectual social reformer just emerging from an Oxford College, he is something less than the rest of us if he lacks that explosive delight in the incongruous which sets us laughing.

It is true that what we read in the

Gospels about Jesus is very little compared to what we might read if we had fuller biographies. And the evangelists were occupied with what seemed to them—what no doubt actually were—more important things about Him. They may not have thought it worth while to record that He laughed even if He did.

Did He know anything of what we mean by love; the love of man for woman and woman for man? It is a passion which may raise us to the heaven of happiness even if we are on earth or may push us down into a very hell of misery. Jesus certainly understood friendship and experienced the love which a man has for his friends. Was not there the disciple whom He loved, who leaned on His bosom at supper time? He could have sympathized with the love of David for Jonathan. But the love of a man for a

woman is a different thing. The world's great lovers are the most romantic figures in history, and love can glorify the most sordid and commonplace life. If Jesus knew nothing about this passion He is indeed remote from us and very far from being complete and perfect man.

I do not know whether you have ever asked these questions in set form as I have written them down; or any of the other questions of the same sort which might be asked. I can not recollect that I have seen them asked or discussed in any book. But I think that a feeling of doubt about these matters may have something to do with the fact that you, and men like you, are holding aloof from Christ. In spite of your admiration for His goodness, as it is described for you in the Gospels, in spite of the inward witness to the truth of His teaching,

you are holding aloof. What you want is to recognize in Him the fulness of manhood, as once men desired to find and did find the fulness of the Godhead visibly. You could follow Him and serve Him more whole-heartedly if you were sure that He had in Him all that there is in you and in men greater than you are. You must be satisfied that He lived completely before you can take Him as the Master of your whole life.

Once men asked and craved to know whether He was indeed Very God of Very God. The answer was evidently not at all easy to find. If it had been easy to find the Church would not have been obliged to spend her best efforts in finding it. It is not written plainly in the pages of the Gospels that He is Very God. If it had been the Church would have been spared years of effort and strife. There need never have

been the series of rending controversies which followed the asking of the question. It was only after much travail that the Church gave birth to her creed and achieved her faith in Very God.

That is why, as I said at the beginning of this letter, the Nicene Creed and the history of it are of the utmost value to us. If it took so long and was so hard to learn to say Very God, it is not likely that we shall find it easy to complete the Creed and say Very Man. The answers to the questions we are asking about Him do not leap to the eye. The very asking of them will seem to many a kind of impiety. We shall have to toil hard in the silent workshop of thought; we shall have to suffer perhaps, and perhaps to fight, before we find our answers. But we must find them, if we are to take Him, as we hope and desire, for the Captain

of our Salvation who will lead us to a better land.

Once men said, "We will worship Him if He is Very God." At another time men said, "We will trust Him if He can deliver us from the burden of our sins." Now we are saying, "We will follow Him if He is Very Man, responding to all that is good in us." Is that it? Or would it not be truer to say that we are turning away from Him because, in spite of His beauty and His gentleness, He seems to have so little in common with us, to be so far from complete and perfect manhood. That, I suppose, is really our attitude. There is very much in our lives, in ourselves, that Jesus takes no part in. He may still be a Friend for certain moods, at certain times, but that is the best there is to be hoped; because there is so much that He does not know or feel.

If the Church is faithful to her Master and will win the world for Him again, she must present Him to the world afresh as Very Man, not only as Very God. The Nicene Creed, with its history of effort behind it, is the witness that the Church can do this. We stand to say that Creed—you and I and others like us—in the faith that what the Spirit enabled the Church to do once, the same Spirit can accomplish in her again; that in the end, dark as our questionings seem now, we shall gain a fuller vision of Him whom we desire to serve.

X

YOU remind me—and you are perfectly entitled to do so, my dear S, —that I have strayed a long way from those remarks of yours which were the occasion of my letters. "After all," you say to me, "in spite of everything you say, how can any reasonable man believe in the resurrection of the body?" And the article of the Creed which asserts this belief is not, you point out, like the great dogmas of the Nicene Creed. It was not achieved with difficulty amid questionings and controversies of one special period. It was part of the original instinctive faith of Christian people. It rests ultimately on the fundamental belief that Christ rose again in the same body in which He suffered, with the marks of His passion plainly visible. "If I do not

believe in this," you say, "how can I be a Christian? And no reasonable man can believe it."

I did not, as you seem to imply, deliberately shirk this point. I took it that you meant me to regard your difficulty about the resurrection of the body as typical of a whole series of difficulties which you felt. I did not guess that you made a special point about this particular belief.

Of course no reasonable man can believe in the resurrection of the body if the words mean that the precise particles of matter which compose my body at the moment of my death are to be reassembled, perhaps centuries afterward, and once more formed into a body for me. Not only can no reasonable man believe that, but it is safe to assert that no man, reasonable or unreasonable, ever did believe it. There are too many perfectly obvious objec-

tions to such a theory for belief to be possible. What about the bodies which are burned, whose particles have been changed into heat or energy? What about the bodies which have been eaten, whose particles have gone to make up other bodies? What about ——? But there is no use multiplying examples of absurdity. You can not really suppose that Christians really believe, or are expected to believe, in the resurrection of the body in that literal sense.

Consider for a moment what your body is, or rather what you know about it, which is not very much. We are told—and I suppose it is true—that in the course of seven years or some such period, every particle of the matter which makes up our bodies changes. Yet the body is the same, in this sense that we are aware all the time that changes are going on, that the bodies

are our own. From the day of our birth to the day when our growth ceases our bodies are changing their size, to some extent their form, and in various respects their appearance. Between birth and, say, the age of twenty years the change is so complete that there is very little resemblance in size, weight, color and even shape between the baby's body and the man's. Yet we know, and nobody thinks of disputing, that it is the same man's body all the time, and therefore the same body. All through my life my body is visibly and plainly changing. Disease changes it. Restored health changes it again. Its powers vary, increasing or decreasing. At a certain age a gradual process of deterioration begins. The body of the "lean and slippered pantaloon with spectacles on nose and pouch at side" is utterly unlike that of the lover "writing sonnets

to his mistress' eyebrow" or that of the soldier "bearded like a pard." Yet, though every particle of matter is different, though there is almost no resemblance between the body that was and that which is in the end, we know that it has been the same body all along.

Is there then anything inconceivable in the belief that a further and greater change may take place, that what Saint Paul calls "our natural body" may become what he calls "a spiritual body"?

Not only do our bodies change of their own accord in the course of years. We ourselves by our conduct and habits, are continually changing them. An athlete changes his body into what it becomes after a course of training. A self-indulgent man leading a sedentary life, makes a kind of body for himself. The drunkard's vice in time marks his

body. The ascetic changes his body. And it is not only physical temperance or excess which alter the body. Our spiritual habits stamp marks scarcely less visible on the face. Courage, self-confidence, patience, gentleness, love and self-sacrifice are visible in the faces, the bearing, the physical conditions of the bodies of people who have grown old in these virtues. So are weakness, querulousness, bad temper, fear, and half a dozen other things of the same kind. Our souls—it is a question-begging word but I must use it—are perpetually modifying our bodies. Is it impossible to suppose that this process may be continued, becoming much more rapid and complete when the soul is working on a spiritual instead of a material body? Thus we catch the Pauline conception of "the body of our humiliation being changed into a glorious body according to the

mighty working of God who worketh in us."

Can you think of living hereafter without a body of some kind? The very word body is misleading since it implies a material and perishable thing. But can you think of living without something corresponding to a body, that something which Saint Paul makes a desperate effort to name when he speaks of the spiritual body? It is possible that after death the spiritual part of us goes back to the great universal spirit and is absorbed into the life which is in all that lives. Men have guessed that as the solution of the mystery of our future. But would you call that living? Would you be satisfied with it? Would it seem anything real to you at all? To me it seems nothing of any value. I can scarcely distinguish it from blank annihilation.

If there is a life hereafter it must be I myself who live it. My identity, my personality, my consciousness of myself must survive. It is nothing to me that the vital spark in me is not extinguished, if it merely becomes part of the flame of some greater life. Swinburne has a comparison of human life to a river which flows into the sea.

"We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever Gods there be,
That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never
That even the weariest river
Winds some time safe to sea."

He is perfectly right in regarding the river as dead when it reaches the sea. It ceases to be a river, although its waters survive in the great ocean. If I am to share the fate of the river waters, becoming part of a spiritual sea, then my life does not live for ever and I "rise up never." The river, to be a

river, needs the banks which confine it. I, if I am really to live, need the bounds and limits of a body, physical or spiritual.

This is the Christian faith. Our personality survives. In that other world you will still be you and I shall be I. We shall know ourselves to be ourselves in spite of the changes of conditions and powers and environment, just as we have always known ourselves to be ourselves here, though our bodies have been perpetually altering, though our minds have enlarged, and the circumstances of our lives have changed. More, we shall not only know ourselves, we shall know each other, as Mary knew Jesus after He had died and risen again.

That seems to me almost the same thing as saying that we shall have bodies of some kind, since the body is that which bounds and limits the life

in us; and without boundaries the banks of the rivers of our being, our spirits would mingle with other spirits and our personality and the thing which makes life really life for us, would be lost.

Absorption into the spirit of the universe, or into God, is not life in any sense in which I desire life. I want to live now. I want very much to live hereafter; but it must be I myself who lives. Otherwise I do not think I want to live at all. And this persistence of personality seems to be possible. It is certainly conceivable to me, only on condition of my having a body of some sort, so that my life is limited and does fade off into other beings. And the body which limits my being hereafter must have the same content, must limit the same personality, as my body does now. Otherwise it will not be I who live. It must be the legitimate

successor of my present body, as my present body is of that which was mine fifty years ago.

The Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body is not an added difficulty, an obstacle in the way of believing in the future life. It seems to me to render that belief easier. If I believe in a future life at all I must believe in the resurrection of the body. So it seems. And the words of the Creed to which you object are the simplest, perhaps the only possible expression of my faith in a future life.

But do you believe in the future life? Do you hold that you and I will still be you and I there as here, self-conscious, rich in memories, recognizable in that other world? That is the real question, and you have not told me your mind about it.

Perhaps you have not made up your mind one way or the other, are unde-

cided whether to believe or not to believe and are content to be so. You are still young and death seems a long way off from you. You are not compelled, as I who am much older am forced, to establish some belief; forced by the near coming of the great change, to settle with myself what I expect afterward—annihilation, absorption, or eternal life, that sure and certain hope which makes the Christian blessed.

Many men, while they are young, are content to live, to work, to follow the best they know, untroubled by the numbing fear of utter death at the end, unsustained by the belief in a greater, better life. They neither believe nor disbelieve. They do not even care to search for proofs which might establish a belief. Is that your position?

It is a curious and very interesting thing to notice that the earlier books

of the Old Testament have nothing whatever to say about life beyond the grave. Prophets, poets and law-givers of God's Chosen People left that subject alone. They believed that certain great truths had been revealed to them directly from God. They believed that God Himself had taught them what was right and wrong, had given them laws and shown them how to live. But there their religion ended. They had no revelation about the life beyond, and they did not seek to find out that secret for themselves. There is no trace in their earlier literature of speculations about the immortality of the soul such as occupied pagan philosophers. Experimental dabbling in the occult was regarded as an unclean and sinful business. Men like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha were, apparently, content simply not to know and not to ask.

It can not have been that they did not want to know. All men want to know the answer to the great enigma. We can tell by some of their writings, especially some of the Psalms, that they did want to know. Read the words which King Hezekiah wrote after he had recovered from his sickness and you will see how intensely he wanted to know what lay beyond the veil. But it seems that the prophets and teachers deliberately refrained from trying to find out. Over and over again they assert and reassert the truth which had been shown them: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God." They struggled passionately to establish the law of God. They were enthusiasts for righteousness, and no men before or since have ever so burned with the passion for doing right and being good. But they did not attempt to discover or pretend to

know what lay in Sheol, the darkness beyond.

Afterward, when the later books were written, we see the beginnings of the belief in another life and the desire to know became articulate. But even then the great religious thinkers of the Jews refrained from speculation, and the hatred of what we call spiritualism became more intense than ever. Many men in our time see no harm in making attempts to establish communications between this world and the other, to pass messages from those who still live here, to those who, as we hope, are living elsewhere. Such communication, if we could really establish it, would seem to offer a certain proof of survival after death. And the pursuit of some point of contact between the living and the dead appears to many to be a legitimate aim. To the Jewish prophets it seemed detest-

able, contemptible and wrong. Isaiah would not have purchased the certainty of life beyond the grave at the expense of degrading himself by dabbling with "ghosts which peep and mutter." Better ignorance—though he must have yearned to know—than knowledge obtained in that way.

Yet it was to the Jews that in the end the revelation came. Jesus, who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, brought life and immortality to light.

Is it strange that the certainty came at last to this people who of all civilized peoples speculated least on the subject and were most determined not to find out by way of wizards and witches, mediums, controls and all the rest of it?

Perhaps it is not strange, but in accordance with God's ways of working, that the great new revelation came in the end to those who held most firmly

to the other truths revealed to them and labored most earnestly to establish what they knew to be righteousness. It was after all only an illustration of the truth which Jesus taught when He said: "If any man will do my will he shall know of the doctrine."

I have pointed out to you this curious fact about the Jews and their belief in another life, and I have quoted these words of the Lord's in order that you may have hope, comfort and strength.

There are things which you do not believe or which you hold to doubtfully and painfully, life beyond the grave perhaps among them. You can not reach a faith that will satisfy you by argument and speculation. Well, we know that we want a certainty beyond that which argument can give or philosophy promise. You will not seek the faith you need—nor do I think you

would find it—where mediums babble and scribble in darkened rooms, where morbid searchings into the occult threaten sanity and destroy reason. Such ways are not for you any more than for Isaiah and the pure clean souls which scorned and hated them.

Yet the faith may be yours, strong, invincible and full of comfort. Faith comes by revelation, from outside, from God. Who shall say to whom it comes or where or when? "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell where it cometh or whither it goeth." So is the Spirit. But it seems certain that more faith comes to him who uses the faith he has. Herein is the saying true "Unto him who hath shall be given." And you have faith, at least in goodness for its own sake, apart from any advantage or gain that goodness may bring, in spite of

any loss or suffering that trying to be good entails. I end where I began. You do believe in the things that Jesus Christ believed in. Live in that faith and other faiths will come. Do His will. You see it and you know it. Follow faithfully and lo, a lightning in the east which once was dark, a spreading from edge of cloud to edge of cloud of the brightness of the dawn, and almost ere you know it the coming of the great strong sun itself, the faith, whole and undefiled, and with it the sure and certain hope of eternal life.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter," said a man far wiser than I am. "Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man."

If that were all and no word remained to be added—even then we might be content; for there is nothing greater or better than just to do the

right careless of consequences, to march on although it be into impenetrable gloom. But that is not all, nor are we left the grim task of duty doing without hope. The God within speaks to the man who listens and obeys, speaks more and more clearly to the man who steadily tries to do the right. The God without comes nearer and makes all things plain to us, if only we are faithful in undisputed simple things, if we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly. Yes; though our eyes and minds are blind at first and no vision comes, though our ears are deaf and we hear no songs of the distant Zion; yet if we persevere in trying to be good God's face in the end will be plain to us and God's voice audible.

THE END

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